

DOCTORAL THESIS

What Was Before isn't Anymore

Image, Theatre and the Italian New Spectacularity 1978-1984

Pitrolo, Flora

Award date:
2014

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

What Was Before isn't Anymore:
Image, Theatre and the Italian New Spectacularity 1978-1984

by

Flora Pitrolo, MA, MPhil

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

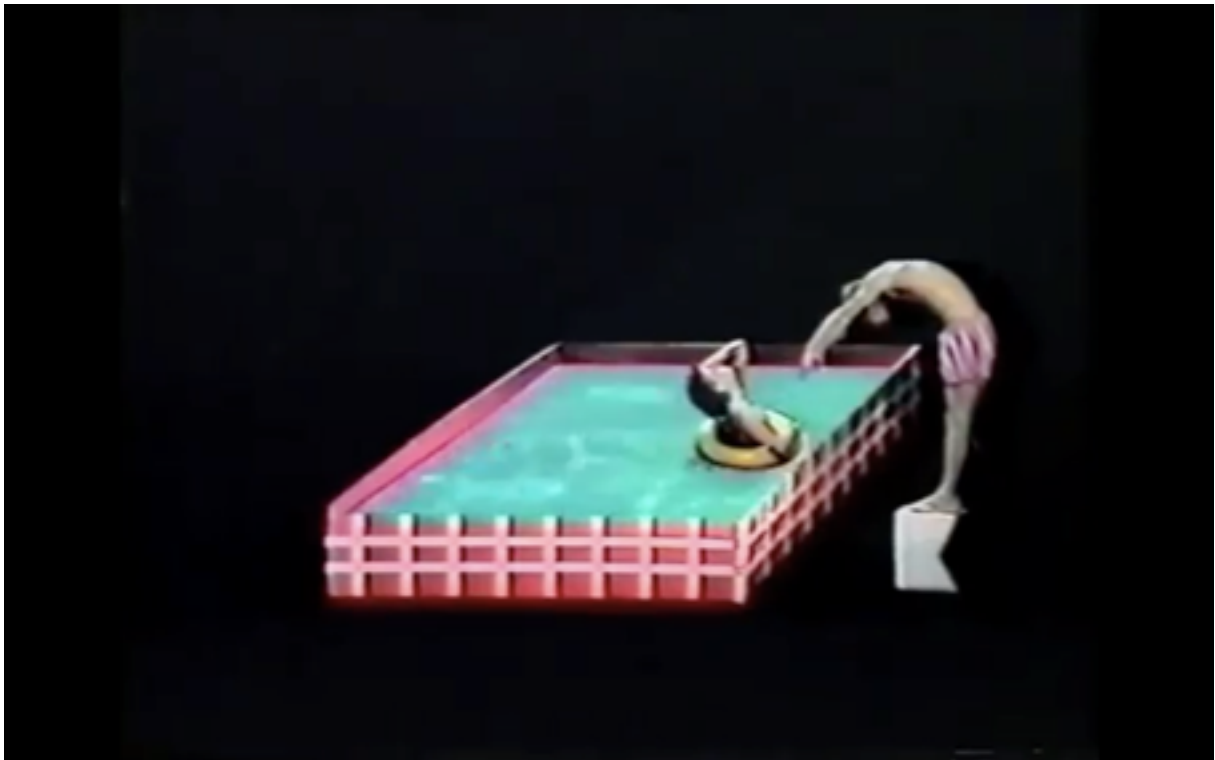
Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance

University of Roehampton, London

2014

Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into Italian experimental theatre practices in the late 1970s and early 1980s commonly referred to as ‘New Spectacularity’, of which it considers the socio-cultural background, the philosophical perspectives and the aesthetic contribution. Conscious of traversing rarely trodden ground, this research takes as its subject the New Spectacularity *per se* while also considering questions regarding its memory and its theorisation. As such, alongside a careful analysis – in some cases the first – of the theatre it takes as its subject of inquiry, this work is invested in drawing up methods and ways of thinking able to do justice to the complex panorama the work exists within. These concern the study of spectatorship in the historical and of the atmospherical quotient of visual theatres, the investigation of the circulation of images as an intermittent movement, and the consideration of affective stances from which the works of art of an era may be crafted in the past as well as reflected upon in the present. These methods and ways of thinking are formulated alongside a study of the Neo-Spectacular stage in an aim to not only shed light on a neglected yet pivotal moment in Italian theatre, but to also be of use to wider discussions concerning performance in its complex and intertwined travelling alongside postmodern philosophy and culture.



Contents

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements | 9 |
| Note to the Reader | 11 |

Part One: A Grammar of the Present

| | |
|---|----|
| A Panorama | 19 |
| Twelve Flashes in the Foreground | 23 |
| Twelve Flashes in the Background | 24 |
| <i>Everything that Italy was Becoming: Towards an Affective Historiography</i> | 25 |
| Interlude: Everything that Italy – | 55 |
| Was Becoming, Almost Became, Didn't Become: some Observations on the Unhappened as Historiographical Category..... | 65 |
| <i>This Message was Recorded Before your Departure: Paraphrasis of Crollo Nervoso...</i> | 85 |

Part Two: Metropolitan Landscapes

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>I Ragazzi di Città: some Preliminary Considerations on the Metropolitan</i> | 119 |
| To the Rooftops, to the Beach: the Inhabitable Image | 134 |
| Dark in the Piazza | 153 |
| Two Panoramas | 165 |
| Towards the Banal: Pasolini, Mendini and the Fireflies..... | 167 |
| <i>America! America! #1: Antonio Syxty's Gas Station, with Soft Breeze</i> | 193 |
| <i>America! America! #2: Magazzini Criminali's On the Road</i> | 212 |
| Blue Fugues: Spatialisation and Fugue in La Gaia Scienza..... | 227 |

Part Three: New Spectacularities, New Spectacles, New Spectators

| | |
|---|-----|
| Surface Games and Side Effects: the Neo-Spectacular Image..... | 249 |
| <i>Cathode Mamma Kiss Me: Television and the New Spectacularity</i> | 267 |
| Consumers, Consuming, Consumed: the Antonio Syxty Fan Club and the Fake | 289 |
| <i>What isn't, is: Paraphrasis of Kaputt Necropolis</i> | 317 |
| Another Panorama..... | 347 |
| An Epilogue in the Key of Swimming Pools, Horses and Sunsets..... | 349 |

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Bibliography | 377 |
|---------------------------|-----|

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Other Cited Works | 399 |
|--------------------------------|-----|

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Appendices | 403 |
|-------------------------|-----|

Acknowledgements

I have been blessed with the help of many in the making and writing of this thesis. The protagonists of this work, Antonio Syxty, Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Marco Solari, Alessandra Vanzi and Romeo Castellucci have offered me their time and told me their tales, sometimes with mixed feelings but always with interest and respect. I am deeply grateful to them for their past work, of course – but also for their present generosity.

My utmost thanks to Valentina Valentini, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, Carlo Infante, Gaia Calimani and Cinzia Ruggeri for their kindness in offering me help, conversation, and even friendship; my thanks also to Michele Mangione at the Venice Biennale archives, Francesco Gajani at Ubulibri, Antonella Bacchini at Riccione TTV and Gilda Biasini from Societas Raffaello Sanzio.

It has been a pleasure to pursue this work at the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance at University of Roehampton, whose staff and students I wish to thank for a four-year interesting conversation. Ella Finer, Fabrizio Manco, Annalaura Alifuoco and Irene Liverani in particular are in this thesis by having been such scintillating interlocutors throughout its formulation, and it has been a joy to share intellectual kinship and friendship with them. I would also like to thank Sarah Gorman for the care she has taken in reading and helping me further my work.

My supervisors P.A. Skantze and Joe Kelleher I cannot thank enough. They have shared their intellectual vigour and rigour with me with a generosity and an attentiveness which has consistently moved me and kept me moving, and they have tirelessly accompanied me in my search for fireflies. I am indebted to them on every page of this work and indebted I shall joyfully remain: it will be a pleasure and a privilege in the continuous to hold on to how their thinking has shaped mine. My thanks to them are truly 'en abyme'.

P.A. Skantze has been a *maestra* to me for the past ten years: as well as for her guidance in this work, I want to thank her for her friendship and for having shown me that this kind of work was even possible.

My deepest appreciation to my friends David G. Lees, Jonathan Rogerson, Anya Keenan, Riccardo Vitello, Danilo Mandic, Joe Hales, Matthew Fink, Poppy Kohner, Gjorgji Janevski, Stephanie Ritch and Christian Heinrichs, as well as to those who have left me in these years and no longer need their names. I thank Robert Jack, whose love and intelligence runs through these pages, for being my accomplice always. I thank Yvonne Lokes and Francesco Pitrolo for their love, encouragement and trust, as well as for the gifts of bilingualism and of study.

I was financially supported by a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council doctoral award in order to undertake this research; without that support, this project would not have been possible.

Note to the Reader

Nuova Spettacolarità, ‘New Spectacularity’ was a term which began to circulate in Italian experimental performance around 1978 / 1979 to define a particular strand of what had, rather more officially, been termed the ‘Post-Avantgarde’¹. The first time it appears in print is in an article by Giuseppe Bartolucci, considered the most acute, most attuned, most attentive critic of the theatre of this time. Bartolucci has a clear sense that the New Spectacularity is an evolution of the Post-Avantgarde: the latter appears to turn into the former². In 1981 a festival took place in Rome called *Nuova Spettacolarità* – by 1981 or 1982 the term was being used in newspaper listings and in the current language of cultural commentators more generally.

While the Post-Avantgarde had a more defined set of coordinates (places and people, poetic, performative and ideological intents) and as such is more defineable as a ‘movement’ in Italian theatre, the idea of ‘New Spectacularity’ begins its life as a label qualifying a *genre* or a style of theatre more than its makers – only later did it begin to apply to companies. While it is sometimes used now as synonymous with media-theatre or video-theatre, the set of activities the term originally designated is much broader: the intensely technological experiments it engendered were just one declination of a larger re-imagining of the theatre as

¹ Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye elaborate on the Post-Avantgarde and its protagonists in *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002. Giannachi and Kaye’s contribution provides a ‘basis’ for this investigation: although I cannot refer to the text every time I elaborate on themes also treated in Giannachi and Kaye’s book, and although their work’s temporal sweep is much broader than mine here, I want to make clear how this thesis moves from the perspective that Giannachi and Kaye have already broken some of this ground for the English reader. Thanks to their contribution, my work has the freedom to move differently through parts of a similar landscape, concentrating on a more specific period and on more specific themes.

² Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Various writings in ‘Dalla Postavanguardia alla Nuova Spettacolarità’ in *Testi Critici 1967-1987*. Ed. Valentini, V. and Mancini, G. Initially published 1980. Rome: Bulzoni, 2007. pp. 243-297.

a medium, and often we find that pieces of ‘video’ or ‘media’ theatre are mirrored in similar experiments executed by more artisanal means³. The New Spectacularity is sometimes referred to as ‘existential’ and ‘analytical’ theatre⁴; as the theatre of an unengaged ‘me generation’⁵; as the theatre of the ‘individualisation of experience’, in which, more than the spectacle, what matters is the consciousness of the spectator⁶. Sometimes, those terms were taken face-value (and perhaps, in their literality, they mean more): it was theatre that was ‘new’ and ‘spectacular’. Broadly speaking, the style ‘New Spectacularity’ defines is one in which late-capitalist systems for the fabrication and circulation of images and meaning (fashion, TV, advertising, new media, club culture, the idea of the ‘metropolis’) are reflected upon and used in the traditional medium of the theatre⁷ in order to develop what critic Oliviero Ponte di Pino in 1988 termed ‘a grammar of the present’⁸.

³ ‘Robert Wilson type works became so important a part of the Italian experimental scene as to be considered a new genre, the ‘Nuova Spettacolarità’ or (‘New Spectacularity’) or ‘Media Theatre’. Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996 and 2013. p. 110

⁴ This definition is used in many places, but synthesised and elaborated on in Bartolucci, Giuseppe and Mango, Lorenzo. *Per un Teatro Analitico Esistenziale*. Turin: Studio Forma, 1980.

⁵ ‘It’s true that we should be skeptical regarding the possibility of a real communication (...). But it’s also true that the only way out for the artist is to keep (...) expressing oneself by talking about expression, to invent by copying oneself. In the hope of finding another oneself in this *me generation*, someone else who can enter the simulacrum by reflex and diffuse concentric circles. If this solo propagation stops working, it won’t be a question of fashion – perhaps future circumstances will truly make the trumpets of engagement sound again.’ Quadri, Franco. ‘Il teatro come luogo critico-sperimentale’. In *Individuo e Coscienza della Crisi nel Teatro Contemporaneo*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981.

⁶ This possibility is illustrated by Laura Gemini in *L’incertezza creativa: i percorsi sociali e comunicativi delle performance artistiche*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003. pp. 111-112

⁷ The broad definition I have just offered for ‘New Spectacularity’ is my own, but synthesised from the definitions of many Italian critics and scholars, including Giuseppe Bartolucci, Franco Quadri, Silvana Sinisi, Valentina Valentini, Carlo Infante, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, Franco Cordelli, Marco Palladini and others. These contributors’ views on what the New Spectacularity is appear and are discussed over the course of this thesis.

⁸ Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988.

Twenty-three or so years after Ponte di Pino's book cited above was published, I had lunch with Ponte di Pino and he said to me: 'compared with the theatre that was being made in Italy at the time, these companies looked like kids who went clubbing'⁹. This is a very fitting definition. Both because it gives a sense of the out-of-placeness of the New Spectacularity and because it helps us understand it not as an organised, organic 'movement' but as something more fragmented and open, something more tied to a Zeitgeist, like a 'wave'. Similarly to how, in the music of the time, new wave (with which the New Spectacularity shares many of its traits, sometimes overlapping in collaborations), witnessed the shocking energy of punk, learned the lessons of post-punk and developed another route, the New Spectacularity – which occurs in the wake of the '77 Movement in Italy – inherited the energy of the Post-Avantgarde and developed a new route, a more 'spectacular' one.

The 'New Spectacularity' was a theatre which appeared to revel in the aforementioned late-capitalist systems of feeling and meaning while all the time displaying some sort of nostalgic longing for the structures from before. With a comparison, we could say that these companies learned to play guitar, tried to smash their guitars, then just sold their guitars and bought synthesizers instead. With the synthesizers, they started to make overly romantic, plasticky, generally melancholy dance music. When people do this sort of thing, they tend to lose some of their friends from their previous scene. They also tend to make new friends elsewhere, and sometimes make some very interesting, though under-publicised, discoveries. With the term *Nuova Spettacolarità* Italian performance designates the later theatre-making attitudes of groups who had been active since the early to mid-1970s, such as La Gaia Scienza

⁹ Conversation between myself and Oliviero Ponte di Pino, Milan, February 2012.

or Magazzini Criminali, when ‘a post-ideological breeze conjugated the idea of the city with speed, or rather, with acceleration. (...) The Post-Avantgarde became New Spectacularity: a theatre which was fast-paced and alluring, perfect for those years.’¹⁰

•

On the subject of what was ‘perfect for those years’, let me rewind the tape for a moment, in order to begin to illustrate (briefly, with a flash) what the tone of ‘those years’ was. On 1st February 1975, a few months before his death, Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote an article on the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper entitled ‘The Void of Power’, which has since become known as ‘the article of the fireflies’¹¹. In the article, Pasolini draws a comparison between Italy’s socio-political situation and its ecological and cultural landscape. He divides the years between 1965 and 1975 into three phases: before, during, and after the disappearance of the fireflies. Over the course of this decade, according to Pasolini, the fireflies literally disappeared from the Italian countryside, which was suffering from industrialisation, from being over-built, from smog and fumes and luminous pollution. Over the course of this decade ‘something happened’ also to the Demochristian politicians of Italy: they were no longer the ‘mere continuation of fascism’: ‘they passed from the phase of the fireflies to the phase of their disappearance without even noticing (...) they never suspected that the power they held wasn’t simply following its “natural” evolution but was becoming

¹⁰ Infante, Carlo. ‘L’Ultima Avanguardia, tra Memora e Oblio’. *Culture Teatrali* 2/3, Primavera – Autunno 2000: Quarant’Anni di Nuovo Teatro Italiano. pp. 275-291. p. 288

¹¹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo. “‘Il Vuoto del Potere’ ovvero l’articolo delle lucciole’. *Corriere della Sera*, 1st February 1975. Republished in *Scritti Corsari*. Milan: Garzanti, 1975. pp. 106-112

something radically “other”. As always – see Gramsci – only in their language did something change (...): now, their robotic manoeuvres and their frozen smiles hide something like a void. Real power just marches on without them’¹².

In making these assertions, Pasolini is ‘updating’ his definition of fascist fascism versus neo-capitalist fascism (‘real’ fascism) in response to an article by Franco Fortini which had appeared a few days earlier: what Pasolini is saying is that that definition, elaborated by Pasolini himself ten years earlier, no longer holds because neo-capitalist fascism had, in a sense, ‘already won’¹³. As Pasolini asserted in almost all of his interventions that year, it was already *too late*. I have translated the last passage of the article of the fireflies in its entirety below, to accompany the reader into the heart of this debate. I take this opportunity to state that unless a translator is explicitly credited, all translations in this work (of books, articles, films, interviews, scripts or archival materials) are my own.

But in history the ‘void’ can’t subsist: it can only be predicated in the abstract and in the absurd. In fact this ‘void’ I speak of is probably already being filled, through a crisis which can’t but stun the entire country. A symptom of this is the way we seem to ‘morbidly’ be awaiting a coup. As if it were enough to ‘replace’ a group of men who has governed us frighteningly for the past thirty years, leading Italy into this economical, ecological, urbanistic and anthropological disaster.

The truth is that it would be useless to replace these (funereally carnivalesque) ‘puppets’ by artificially reinforcing the old structures of fascist power (and anyway, in this case, the ‘troupe’ would by definition have to be a

¹² Ibid.

¹³ In many of his articles throughout the 1960s and 1970s, beginning with his interventions on the journal *Il Politecnico* in the mid ‘60s, Pasolini asserted that *that* fascism, that is the Demochristian fascism which was leading Italy into industrialisation and consumer capitalism, was much more damaging than Mussolini’s fascism, whose modernisation had merely intervened cosmetically on Italy without being able to interfere with its culture. He refers consistently to Demochristian fascism as operating an ‘anthropological mutation’, more dangerous because much deeper and irremediable.

troupe of nazis). True power, that which these puppets have been serving for the past ten years without even noticing: that's what may have already filled the void (and, in doing so, it has also crippled the potential for a great communist country born from Italy's ruination: because we're not talking about 'governing'). Of this 'true power', all we have are abstract, and all in all apocalyptic images: we're unable to imagine what 'shape' it would take if it were to take the place of its servants, who were naive enough to think of it as of a form of technical 'modernisation'. In any case, as far as I'm concerned (assuming my opinion is of any interest to the reader), let me be very clear: however multinational I may be, I would give the whole Montedison for a single firefly.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid. Montedison was Italy's largest chemical and electrical company.

Part One:
A Grammar of the Present

A Panorama

The time is sometime in the Summer of 2008, and I am driving up to Monreale, one of the hills overlooking Palermo. I am driving up there because tonight's show is by Dàimon Kybernetes, the company I used to work with as a teenager, the company I owe a lot to, a company whose work I love. As I drive up the bends on the hill, I think back to the shows we made together and to the older shows of theirs I saw, notably a piece called *Puro Spirito e Saliva* ('Pure Spirit and Saliva', 1985) which they had reprised sometime in the early 2000s for ten of us at the most. I think back to Daniela Colajanni shining a torch into my eyes as I sat startled in the audience; I think back to the presence of green iridescent yogurt. I think back to that sticky suburban theatre, 'Crystal' I think it was called, where the highlights of the season were end-of-year ballet school showcases. I think we drank in the courtyard afterwards, I think until very late – I think I got into trouble for how late I got home and I really don't think I cared.

I also think back to a hot Spring evening around 2000 or 2001 in the car park of a supermarket in an artery of the city, all traffic and sad oleanders, where a few days later we would have showed a performance. I remember Gabriella Brigiano, the director of the company, mentioning something about Magazzini Criminali, one of the companies present in this investigation. I had never heard the name before. It stuck. 'Criminal Warehouses': it was a good name. A lot of things stuck. I think back to other details, unimportant bits and pieces, but details of having spent a large part of four years with these people. I remember Gabriella again telling the group about having had her card sucked up by a bank machine because she

been distracted by watching a mime on the street. I remember her being furious when the price of cigarettes went up and repeating, in Sicilian, that she'd told 'them' not to, displaying a disarming sense of 'why if we say no do they do things anyway?' which I remember very clearly – a feeling I grew to recognise, beyond, alas, the price of cigarettes.

•

Nuances takes place on the Monreale belvedere. The Monreale cathedral, the *duomo*, dominates the view from the city, and behind the cathedral are cloisters and courtyards. To the right of the cathedral, off the piazza, is the belvedere, planned at the same time as the Cathedral, where Oscar Wilde used to go to find the most beautiful boys. The belvedere overlooks the 'Golden Shell', the name of which stands today as a nostalgic remnant: from Monreale to Palermo, the whole valley used to be a citrus grove, glistening in the sunshine as the town of Monreale also, and still, glistens by way of Byzantine excesses. Late summer, nighttime, the belvedere is a place where you go for ice cream, and you may find the odd birthday party, or a dated lounge-jazz band, or newly-wedded couples taking photographs. There are mothers chatting, children screaming, old men huddled round benches. Late summer, nighttime, the Golden Shell is an endless panorama of concrete villas built without planning permission, where the odd horse pushes hay around amongst the abandoned old fridges, cars speed by too fast. Here, the Palermitan company Dàimon Kybernetes are performing the world I recognise so well, a world which – I realise only in hindsight, is a world fabricated from the energy of the tail end of the Italian New Spectacularity.

Dance somewhere between Cunningham and Bacchus, empty spaces filled with long hair. The dancers are technical, muscular, strong yet abandoned, they are tired, they are hot, but they are powerful. A woman recites extracts from the Italian pulp writer Isabella Santacroce, delivering the words in the red-lipsticked B-movie style of Dario Argento's films, in which the acting is purposefully hammy by way of a semi-sentimental lack of expression: her accent is like a teenage girl's, the vowels are too open, certain words end too roughly, all the short, jagged sentences acquire the tone of a brusquely posed question. In distorted bursts, British industrial music, metallic, martial, extreme is pumped too loud out of the speakers, which are placed on the stage itself, exposing all the roughness of the set-up. As always, Dàimon are *out of place*, bringing visions of elsewhere into car parks, piazzas, schools. As a performer, I never even thought of this – but as a spectator, this out-of-placeness is extremely clear: the vision always switches back and forth between the reality of the piece and the reality of its circumstances: one minute the dancer Maura Cimino is pure white light kicking herself out of the world; the next minute she is a young girl with bruised feet inappropriately writhing on the public piazza. But this piazza *is* their place, I think to myself. She *has to* writhe here.

At the end of the piece Gabriella comes on stage by herself, in total darkness and total silence, and proceeds to set fire to a miniature wooden Opera dei Pupi theatre which she is holding like a waitress with a tray. We sit for what feels like a long time watching the little red and gold Sicilian puppet theatre blazing, falling upon itself in an enormous cloud of paint-smelling smoke, the odd nail gets spat out of the structure making a silvery sound on the makeshift stage. The theatre burns completely.

•

As I drive down, I remember something else. The time was sometime in the early 2000s, and the performance was called *All'Assalto del Cielo* ('Assaulting the Sky'). I remember the first scene, I remember my movement, I remember my dress, and I remember my text, which was the first chapter from Raoul Vaneigem's *Movement of the Free Spirit*, entitled from the *Twilight of the Bureaucrats to the Dawn of Divine Economics*. I must have been sixteen, fifteen, and I took from it what I could take: I took its energy, I suppose. But because I learned it by heart – and things learned by heart stick – I am able to speak it to myself as I drive back down the hill, into the city.

It starts like this:

Nobody looks back any further than his or her present. No previous era, however clouded by unavoidable confusions, has more successfully propagated the idea that everything rides on the present moment. What can be learned from the past which is not already implicit in the very act of contemplating it? Those who set off, trying to escape past fears and anxieties over wealth or poverty, will only find reminders of their present state of exile. What one looks for in the past is precisely what one has already found.¹⁵

¹⁵ Vaneigem, Raoul. *The Movement of the Free Spirit: General Considerations and First-Hand Testimony Concerning Some Brief Flowerings of Life in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and, Incidentally, in Our Own Time*. New York: Zone, 1994 (1986). p. 15

Twelve Flashes in the Foreground

Paderno, 1941. Pier Paolo Pasolini sees fireflies.

Genoa, 1974. The architect Alessandro Mendini sets fire to a chair.

Rome, 1975. Pier Paolo Pasolini can no longer see fireflies.

Rome, 1977. La Gaia Scienza run across neon-lit rooftops.

Rome, 1978. Critic Giuseppe Bartolucci declares that the Italian avant-garde is riding into the sunset.

Milan, 1979. Mendini begins to make banal rooms and banal objects.

Florence, 1980. Magazzini Criminali bounce in a cage of venetian blinds.

Milan, 1981. Antonio Syxty invents a soft breeze and calls it 'Eloise'.

Naples, 1982. Falso Movimento perform a jump into a chromakey swimming pool.

Rimini, 1984. Pier Vittorio Tondelli watches the sparkling riviera.

Venice, 1984. Romeo Castellucci in a mask made of daisies and a cowboy hat.

Venice Lido, 1985. An American military cruiser docked on Riva degli Schiavoni; sailors, backlit by the sun, are doing exercises on deck. In the background, Sandro Lombardi and Pier Vittorio Tondelli talk about a piece called *Genet a Tangeri*.

Twelve Flashes in the Background

San Giacomo in Palude, 1975. Grotowski takes young performers to a desert island.

Bologna, 1977. Riots.

Milan, 1978. Antonio Syxty *wishes he could fly like Superman.*

Rome, 1979. Magazzini Criminali play a gig.

Bologna, 1980. The Central station is blown up by right-wing terrorists.

Correggio, 1980. Pier Vittorio Tondelli goes to parties in provincial Italy.

Munich, 1980. Magazzini run around a stadium with guns and sunglasses.

Milan, 1981. A catwalk-cocktail opening party in a Milanese basement theatre.

Naples, 1981. Young American actor Tomas Arena dances with venetian blinds.

Salerno, 1982. A silver-clad man walks amongst pink triangles and laser beams.

London, 1983. A girl in a big red dress looks bored on Mendini's 'Proust' armchair.

New York, 1984. Alessandra Vanzi dances a tropical dance on a yellow bridge.

**Everything that Italy was Becoming:
towards an Affective Historiography**

Of course it was a failure of sorts, but while others really suffered from the blow, Pier managed to ignore the darkest epilogue of the 1970s and to respond in a creative, open manner, leaving behind his generically political past and concentrating instead on everything that Italy was becoming.¹⁶

The sentence above is taken from a book entitled *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*, a sort of tribute to the novelist Pier Vittorio Tondelli, who passed away in 1991, by Tondelli's friend and fellow writer Enrico Palandri¹⁷. The failure of sorts which Palandri refers to is Tondelli's political 'abdication' after the publication of his first novel *Altri Libertini* ('Other Libertines', 1980), a novel which was published and immediately recalled from bookshops on order of the Vatican, which claimed that it incited 'sexual depravation and scorn towards the Catholic church'¹⁸. *Altri Libertini* is not a political novel – if anything it is, as the Communist party described it at the time, 'a political novel about the absence of politics'¹⁹: a nihilist novel, following the apocalyptically apolitical adventures of a group of friends. There's a lot of prostitution, a lot of heroin addiction, a lot of mindless sex, some violence. Imbued with a love for provincial life, it unflinchingly watches a provincial world collapse under the weight of its own taste for myth, in a sense; under its own vulnerable passionality²⁰. Together with

¹⁶ Palandri, Enrico. *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2005. p. 19.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Vatican censorship order for *Altri Libertini*, quoted in Deaglio, Enrico. *Patria 1978-2008*. Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2009. p. 102.

¹⁹ Interview with Massimo D'Alema published in *L'Espresso* from February 10th 1981 and quoted in Deaglio, Enrico. *Patria 1978-2008*. Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2009.

²⁰ I halt here to ask the reader to keep this idea of 'vulnerable passionality' in mind for some of the passages that follow; the idea will become clearer over this chapter and the following. I also ask the reader to pardon me the neologism 'passionality', but we need it.

some of Antonello Branca's documentaries from the time, with some of Claudio Caligari's films such as *Amore Tossico* ('Toxic Love', 1983), it offers some of the most ruthless descriptions of Italy's post-1977 heroin boom, political decline and disillusion of the youth – and it is set in Emilia Romagna, one of the regions that was most politically active in the 1970s and hence also, inevitably, one of the regions that suffered the most in the years after '77²¹. It smells of burning rubber in the countryside.

The action Palandri describes, this choice to abandon politics, is reflected especially in Tondelli's characters, in the events he describes, in the 'scenes' ('faunas', as he used to call them) he frequents. The move Tondelli makes is, in effect, the literary equivalent of the passage into New Spectacular theatre, of which he was an avid spectator: his books become populated with disco-goers, trendy beach kids, drunken gallerists; we follow the dreams and misadventures of desperate journalists, local punk bands, failed romantic authors. *This* is 'everything that Italy was becoming', patently visible in his novel *Rimini* ('Rimini', 1984), in his collection of reflections and articles *Un Weekend Postmoderno: Cronache dagli anni Ottanta* ('A Postmodern Weekend: Chronicles from the 1980s', 1990), in his play *Dinner Party: La Notte della Vittoria* ('Dinner Party: the Night of Victory', 1984) and in other texts which will both follow us and guide us in the pages that follow – texts which are precious because they are invested in telling stories which, if we look back to the Italian literary canon, are quite rarely told. This thesis tells the story of a 'failure of sorts': its subject occurs in a wake. How can we historicise a wake, something which exists in an 'isn't anymore', the wave behind a boat that has left or the tender meeting of friends and family around a dead loved

²¹ We shall return to the significance of 1977 time and again throughout this investigation – for now, let us simply take it as the marker of an apex of political engagement.

one? How can we find a language, a tone for it? Can we take it seriously, even if it's full of silly things, little things? Is concentrating on everything that Italy was becoming an apolitical action? Can we do something with it? Can we reveal its political reason to be? Can we, or indeed should we, phrase our sentences like Palandri's, beginning with an 'of course', followed by a 'but'?

Upon entering a discussion on an affective historiography, as I move towards proposing answers to these questions, I would like to leave hanging in the air something from Tondelli's only play, the 1984 piece *Dinner Party*: I would like to go to his (only) theatre, in which the author offers a silhouette of an explanation for his *failure of sorts*. Set at a dinner party with members of the up and coming, euphoric yet depressed intellectual yuppies of the new, metropolitan 'art fauna', *Dinner Party* contains a few Brechtian moments in which the narrative pierces (very *discreetly*) through its own frivolous fiction. The friends are – veiledly, and quite cruelly – discussing the love triangles of those present by pretending to discuss the love triangles of those absent. Didi, a young, rich author with an alcohol problem speaks about how in his generation's sensibility, 'irony is the new tragedy because it leaves no space for tragedy'²². Tommy, an older and wiser glamorous American family friend, a father figure to Didi and to his equally troubled brothers, responds to Didi's assertion with a long monologue, the end of which I want to translate here:

Tragedies are tragedies because they have the human element; then there's also passion, family ties; there's an idea of government, there's a revolutionary utopia, which is to say the rage of the gods. But at the moment, in Italy, nobody's able to offer these representations. Oh, it isn't only lack of talent,

²² Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Dinner Party (la Notte della Vittoria)*. Milano: Bompiani, 1994. p. 72

which is just another incarnation of the rage of the gods... it's just that Italy lacks a collective intelligence required to do all of this. And besides, I don't think the answer lies in the fact that all people want to do is have fun. That's bullshit! Let's just say that, right now, tragedy is always slightly outside of us. However we try and represent it, it'll always be limited. It's never a universal tragedy... let's say it's a 'discreet' tragedy.²³

The stage direction notes that Jiga, the Filipino maid, clears plates for the whole duration of Tommy's intervention. After a beat, Mavie, fashion editor in her forties, sighs: 'Well, maybe you've never been married.'²⁴

•

In his 1966 essay 'The Idea of Nostalgia', Jean Starobinski observes that a particular kind of difficulty exists in talking about a mode of feeling in the historical: 'emotion is not a word, but it can only be spread abroad through words'²⁵. There is, implicit in the process of writing in an historical mode – be the subject of our labour thirty or three-hundred years away – a necessity for naming which, though inevitable, renders things in confinement. If an *emotion*, in Starobinski's vocabulary – a mode of feeling, let's call it²⁶ – relies, in its moment of naming and in its future, on being *spread abroad through words*, this causes trouble: the

²³ Ibid. p. 73

²⁴ Ibid. p. 73

²⁵ Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia'. Trans. William S. Kemp. *Diogenes*, June 1966 14: 81-103.pp. 81, 82

²⁶ Three notes on the expression 'mode of feeling': 1. this expression is indebted to Mario Perniola, who uses it mostly in his *Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* to describe the 'mode of feeling of things'; 2. it is crossed with Raymond Williams' idea of 'structures of feeling', which I shall return to; 3. it also, via Williams, has something to do with Hebdige, that is, with the 'meaning of style'.

trouble of finding the word, the trouble of intercepting a word in the historical then and translating it for the historicised now; the trouble of singling out *how* something was named, that it is of getting to grips with the semantic, and hence affective constellation which engendered the naming itself. Other troubles occur in the ‘tracking’ of an emotion and in the ‘tracking’ of a word – the two do not always go hand in hand, for ‘the verbalisation of emotion is intertwined with the structure of that which is experienced’²⁷, and language and structure couple and uncouple, choose words, lose others, shift over time. How do *emotions* shift over time? How do their words change? Can we go backwards from how a word *feels* to how a word *felt*? Like a plane on a radar, we watch dots appear and disappear, unable to affirm with certainty if the object that departs and the object that arrives are, in effect, the same object.

Around the idea of the *emotion*, of the *mode of feeling*, a number of other words – things that spread abroad – have huddled, forming a sort of orgonic embrace, becoming related and, over time, delineating a field of inquiry and its methods. Amongst these words are ‘atmosphere’ and ‘sensibility’, words which occur constantly in the Neo-Spectacular literature and which have dominated my conversations with the theatre-makers I have interviewed, corresponded with, been in contact with in these years. It was a ‘neo-sensibility’ that was attributed to this theatre, and the critics who understood it, such as Giuseppe Bartolucci, were said to be in tune with this sensibility: a question of attunement. A ‘switch’ in sensibility is described, the sensibility of the 1970s versus that of the 1980s, as if hearts and minds had travelled down the keyboard together, happening to settle at a certain key, by will or by

²⁷ Jean Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’. Trans. William S. Kemp. *Diogenes*, June 1966 14: 81-103. p. 82

circumstance. Some words appear, other words disappear, and ‘what really changes is something more general, over a wide range, and the description that best fits the change is the literary term “style”’²⁸. Often, in the documents of the time, we find this sensibility described, as ‘fast-paced’, ‘alluring’, ‘seductive’²⁹: other words that spread about an emotion but which refuse to let themselves be pinned down; words, in effect, which tell us little about an image or about an event though they *do* tell us a lot about structures of feeling – and they *do* tell us a lot about the atmosphere. The problem is how to deal with this substance – this atmosphere – over time.

I am in the excellent company of Gernot Böhme and Teresa Brennan, amongst others, in asking myself how to treat the idea of atmosphere; and I am struck by how, although neither are occupied by the task of writing about performance, the theatre makes its way into their arguments regardless. In her book *The Transmission of Affect*, which concerns itself with other phenomena but which runs alongside our discussion here, Brennan purposefully employs the term ‘theater, as I will term the *deliberate* creation of an atmosphere’³⁰ which she sets apart from the atmospheres which arise without deliberate ‘engineering’ in everyday life. Böhme has gone even further:

It is the art of the stage set which rids atmospheres of the odour of the irrational: here, it is a question of producing atmospheres. This whole undertaking would be meaningless if atmospheres were something purely

²⁸ Williams, Raymond. *Structures of Feeling in Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. p. 131

²⁹ These adjectives in particular are lifted from of Infante, Carlo. ‘L’Ultima Avanguardia, tra Memora e Oblio’. *Culture Teatrati* 2/3, Primavera – Autunno 2000: Quarant’Anni di Nuovo Teatro Italiano. pp. 275-291.p. 288

³⁰ Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. p. 29

subjective. For the stage-set artist must relate them to a wider audience, which can experience the atmosphere generated on the stage in, by and large, the same way. It is, after all, the purpose of the stage set to provide the atmospheric background to the action, to attune the spectators to the theatrical performance and to provide the actors with a sounding board for what they present. The art of the stage set therefore demonstrates from the side of praxis that atmospheres are something quasi-objective. What does that mean?³¹

Here Böhme is talking about scenography. Both thinkers agree that the theatre is the place where we discover that atmosphere isn't something fortuitous nor is it subjective, but something that certain people – people of the theatre – can orchestrate to the most minuscule detail, tuning the environment and the people within that environment the way you would tune a piano – not mystery, but precision³². Böhme furthers his reflections by ushering in the notion of *phantastike techne* found in Plato, which, as described by Böhme, hinges on the idea that 'the artist does not see his actual goal in the production of an object or work of art, but in the imaginative idea the observer receives through the object (...) it relates to the subject's power of representation, to the imagination or *imaginatio*'³³. The observer, the subject with powers of representation: the 'imagining subject' also known, on this side of town, as the spectator. While it is true that atmospheres and a series of objects and events we can treat as

³¹ Böhme, Gernot. 'The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres.' in *Ambiances*, Redécouvertes, 10 février 2013, accessed May 20th 2013 at ambiances.revues.org/315

³² Let me halt for a moment on the notion of the tuned piano: yes precision and not mystery, but furthermore pianos are not tuned 'mathematically' but tuned, in effect, to the structures of feeling of a time. The well-tempered clavier is perceptually correct for the music it plays, but it is not 'scientifically' correct – a 'perfectly' tuned clavier doesn't accommodate the music in the same way. Pianos are tuned to the ear of a time and a place, and hence of the time and the place of a music.

³³ Böhme, Gernot. 'The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres.' in *Ambiances*, Redécouvertes, 10 février 2013, accessed May 20th 2013 at ambiances.revues.org/315. I will address this notion at various turns throughout this study, and will locate a possible idea of *phantastike techne* for the Neo-Spectacular in the shadow projected at the side of the surface, an idea I have developed from Mario Perniola who in turn develops the notion of shadow from Walter Benjamin's notion of aura. This is the subject of much of Part III/1, 'Surface Games and Side Effects: the Neo-Spectacular Image'.

invisible and unclassifiable³⁴ are part of the very fabric that makes the theatre, while it is true that *feelings and things* may be manipulatable to the scale of the speck of dust, their effect only works by way of a narrative, social, aesthetic pact between the theatre and its audience. Because of this, a key word in this study and in its methods is ‘circulation’: circulation of images and of the atmospheres ushered in by such images. The questions I ask throughout this study regard where an image comes from, how its atmosphere is felt, how it travels across spaces, times, bodies. I ask these questions in the historical: how can we trace the atmosphere of an image in order to study past spectatorship? In order to avoid the notion of ‘circulation’ of an image and of its atmosphere turning into a sort of sociology, this study is also injected, time and again, with a question of desire. In other words, although armed with sociological detail and data, my stance in this study implies that if an image circulates, at the theatre, it does so because it has a libidinal charge that makes its circulation worthwhile: engineered atmospheres, indeed, but engineered for a very specific reason.

Walking alongside ‘atmosphere’, the word ‘sensitivity’ is followed about, as if by a shadow, by the word ‘sentiment’ and its derivatives ‘sentimental’ and ‘sentimentality’; this, again, is due to the fact that the word occurs time and again in the New Spectacular ‘plot’. This word in particular poses problems, due to its fall from credibility – in reading it, understanding it, finding myself using it and needing to use it, it has become clear to me that it has gone out of fashion although it has shifted little in meaning: it is and was shrouded in a feuilletonish, dewey-eyed, butter-hearted silliness, both in English and Italian, but something

³⁴ I pause here, on invisibility making up the very fabric of the theatre, on Andrew Sofer’s definition of such effects as ‘dark matter’ in his recent book – a definition which I have found particularly resonant in thinking about this theatre. See Sofer, Andrew. *Dark Matter. Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.

pushed it into language in these theatre-makers' work. That something is laced with irony, most probably; yet, something pertaining to a 19th century mode of feeling also resists within it, something that surrenders, something that gives in. I have found myself almost reclaiming this word for its unique capacity to disarm, which arises also by its quasi-masochistic, almost self-destructive invitation to mockery: it is a word which accepts the risk of being misunderstood, belittled or derided. It is a word pertaining to a whole sphere of feeling we could describe as neo-romantic, which, of course, occurs at the same time as the subcultural movement by the same name; this shows us, in a sense, that this lean towards this particular prism of vulnerability was in the air – and if we look for it now, we notice that it has, effectively, disappeared. At 4, Great Queen Street, where the famous London Blitz Club used to be, stands an erotic gentlemen's club called the Red Rooms – perhaps this too tells us something³⁵.

More words: 'pulviscule', and its rare derivate, 'pulviscular', associated in English mostly with Italo Calvino but used more frequently in Italian to designate those phenomena whose appearance is mist-like ('pulviscular capitalism' – for example). A notion of *pulviscule*, of *diffusion* of the image, of affect, of aesthetic experience runs through this thesis. Again in the shape of a semantic embrace, other words appear in the wake of pulviscular, words similar in meaning but whose usage in the thinking and writing of others have invested and charged them with sense. Amongst these words is dust, caught by Nadia Serematakis in its settling, and in what the settling of the dust tells us: 'dust can be the subject of historical analysis just

³⁵ The London Blitz Club was the home of New Romantics in London in the early to mid-1980s.

as much as the senses, objects and experiences that dust interrupts and blurs'³⁶. The difference between dust and pulviscule is that pulviscule doesn't settle; in Calvino's usage, in *Why Read the Classics?*, it is qualified by the adverb 'constantly': 'a classic is a work which constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of critical discourse around it, but which always shakes the particles off.'³⁷ My choice of the words 'pulviscule' and 'pulviscular' as important terms for this work is influenced heavily by its most common usage in Italian in the expression *pulviscolo atmosferico*, literally 'atmospherical pulviscule'. These, in everyday Italian, are words used to describe fine mists of dust, speckles of dust, tinier than dust; the kind of dust that does not settle – a diffusion of dust which is everywhere, always, yet rarely visible. It becomes visible in theatre lights (or theatre lights before they were LED); it becomes patently visible through venetian blinds, an object and a figure which is present in this study and present incessantly, obsessively on the Neo-Spectacular stage. Then again it is present, 'continuously', in many, too many performances, artworks, films of the early 1980s; but also advertisements, music videos, designed interiors, fashion magazines.

Before I go any further, I want to advance an affective historiographical question: a question concerned with pulviscule, circulation, sentiment and shadow. A question which, like much of this methodology, arises from the observation of its very object of inquiry: why is it that venetian blinds are so pervasive an occurrence in the cultural but also in the commercial world of the 1980s? What do they bring about? Yes, they're in fashion, of course: and why should we be naive enough to think they get to the stage via some sort of cultivated

³⁶ Seremataakis, Nadia. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994. p. 38

³⁷ Calvino, Italo. *Why read the classics?* Translation by Martin McLaughlin. London: Vintage, 1999. p. 6

symbolism. The question, though, is why: why *then*? And what is it they can do that another blind can't?

In fact, the venetian blind is quite a sophisticated visual mechanism: sophisticated yet artisanal, and reliant on a simple, common, even cheap object. It operates, it seems to me, various effects (with great ease): it divides light into stripes, and divides the object on the other side of the venetian blind into stripes also – faces, bodies, rooms appear disassembled, horizontally cut-up. This ‘makes strange’, but in quite a particular way, because it makes *geometrical*: it seems that it is not only a question of dimness, of half-light, but also a question of imposing a shape (a rigid, ordered, straight shape) onto the (soft, disorderly?) everyday. This geometric effect is accompanied, and this adds greatly to its complexity, by the aforementioned fact that the stripes make it possible to see this dust, indeed the *pulviscolo atmosferico* which by dirtying the light ‘diffuses’ the image, the room, the body illuminated. Especially in the case of metal blinds (and most of the blinds which appear in films, in theatre, in photographs from this time are metallic) the silvery surfaces also operate a refraction of light: the image is cut into strips but also made somehow ‘celestial’ by way of this diffusion – a controlled aura?³⁸

We can ask this: does the venetian blind operate a visual effect, a visual topos, which is a sort of precursor to the fuzzy aesthetics of techno-capitalism³⁹? Does it garner its seduction

³⁸ This idea of ‘diffusion’ is one which will also appear often in this investigation, mostly in Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris’ notion of the ‘diffused metropolis’ as, at the same time, the ‘locus of an intense aesthetic experience’ and, as Susan Stewart has defined it, the city made ‘gigantic’ by ‘the abstraction of an exchange economy’. The controlled aura will also return – perhaps it is indeed the aura after reproduction.

³⁹ I refer here to an idea of ‘fuzzy aesthetics’ developed by Mario Perniola in the works *Art and its Shadow*, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, and in various issues of the journal ‘Agalma’, most prominently in Agalma 18, October 2010: ‘Strategie del Bello: 40 Anni di Estetica Italiana’. Milan: Mimesis, 2010.

in performing a sort of computer-graphical ‘cold’, ‘modern’ aesthetics without the need for computer graphics, an ‘aesthetics of media’ or a kind of ‘media without media’, as Aneta Mancewicz has recently, fascinatingly described similar effects⁴⁰? Why does the venetian blind appear so often in proximity to luxury goods, why does it speak of a ‘moneyed’ environment? Is it because of its ‘mystery’, because it forbids us to see clearly? Why do these blinds appear in the yuppie’s penthouse, in the modelling agency, on the door of the private detective’s office – what do they tell us about the characters that inhabit these spaces? And, as a famous song about luxury penthouses goes, ‘what goes on there / what to do there’⁴¹?

The blinds collapse, the light is interrupted, the body is but a dark silhouette behind the slats. As in a modern day *corral* with its elaborate blind(ing) system of *celosias*, the venetian blind separates the scenic action from the everyday, theatricalises the ordinary, divides people and spaces according to status: there is indeed a form of *celos*, of jealousy, *jalousie*, involved – a revealing without revealing, a provocation. The term *venetian* for such blinds travels together with the *persian* blind and, in Italian, also with the term *saracinesca*, a saracen blind, usually of the roll-down, metallic sort – they are all related to the *corral*, to this seeing and not seeing, to the fact of being ‘veiled behind screens’. We inherit these words from Muslim Europe, be it in its more Ottoman or in its more Andalusian incarnations. And for a series of reasons, including relationships with computer graphics and including relationships with screens more generally, it seems that this visual element and *its* pulviscule – the images it drags along with it – matters in the 1980s. Partly because it matters in general but partly also

⁴⁰ Aneta Mancewicz describes such an effect regarding the work of Ravenna-based company Fanny & Alexander in a paper delivered at the IFTR Intermediality working group in Barcelona in July 2013, entitled ‘Re-routing Intermediality: Digital Intermediality without Digital Technology’.

⁴¹ I quote from Roxy Music’s *In Every Dream Home a Heartache*. On *For your Pleasure*. London: Island, 1973.

precisely because it carries around with it a sphere which has something to do with the act of subtracting light, of subtracting from view, of masking and smoke-screening, the venetian blind also matters in the theatre. An affective historiography asks itself why that may be. It wonders if this image is perhaps best explained as the epitome, the powerful symbol or even the monument of theatricality coming into everyday life: of the *deliberate* orchestration of an atmosphere in our homes, in our rooms, in our penthouses but also, and much more crucially, *not* in our penthouses. Venetian blinds execute scenography in the sphere of the domestic. They do the ‘Böhme effect’ at home: perhaps, like at the theatre, we even get to be something else. Venetian blinds maybe stand for something more important than we may initially think: in spite of (which is also to say because of) their appearance in the spheres of mystery and luxury, they symbolize a democratization of control over the aesthetic ‘effects’ of an environment. This is, of course, an affective beast – and absolutely a political one, too⁴².

Emotion, feeling, sensibility, atmosphere, pulviscule. The term ‘affective historiography’ is how I have chosen to designate the set of operations I have employed in this research and in the process of writing it. It is not woven out of a pure search for a methodology, but offered by the work itself, by the objects of my inquiry and the kind of thinking these objects trigger. Objects which belong to different categories, a disorderly archive of voices and people and things; all of which make present, make available their atmospheres, even to she who comes into contact with them thirty years downstream. It has its genesis in a desire to not only ‘not let go’ of all of those entities – pulviscule, atmosphere,

⁴² We shall return to these ideas in Part II as we observe the moves made by Alessandro Mendini and his atelier, Studio Alchimia, towards what they termed the ‘banal’ in architecture. The fine lines between kitsch and democratization of aesthetic ‘taste’ run through this thesis and supply part of its skeleton.

sentiment – which make up so much of spectatorship and which resist even in the ‘dead’ things of the archive, but also in a desire to ‘do justice’ to these elements, to these entities, to these figures.

To write towards an affective historiography is, then, partly qualifiable as an effort to develop an historiography *of* a postmodern era (early 1980s) *in* a postmodern era (early 2010s): an attempt to unroll a certain sense of ‘being rolled in’ upon ourselves (like a blind). By this I intend that it thrives on an understanding that the various social and cultural phenomena (which are also economical and political) heavily theorised as postmodern – citationism, randomisation, cannibalisation, appropriation, pastiche, simulacra, simulations – generate a certain amount of critical confusion which, although these phenomena are not ‘nonsense’ (a word from past diatribes on postmodern theory), makes the study of these phenomena *slip* easily. The doublenesses, the smoke-and-mirrornesses which make up so much of the very movement of these phenomena occur at a kind of *speed* of thought which, like the view from a speeding car, melts the landscapes into shapes that they are not. This theoretical ‘speeding by’ is crucial to Nigel Thrift’s passage from de Certeau’s walking to Thrift’s own driving in the city, to his quest for ways to understand ‘a background to the background’⁴³; an affective historiography builds upon this passage, attempting to ‘keep still’ the landscape from the car window while nevertheless seeking to burn into our thinking the image of the melting landscape speeding by, the image of the landscape not the way it is, but the way it is perceived through speed.

⁴³ Thrift, Nigel. ‘Driving in the City’. *Theory Culture Society* 2004 21: 41. p 46-47

The ‘shapes’, as we could call them, of postmodern thinking and cultural practices (let us think of them as shapes: venetian blinds, trompe-l’oeil, mises en abyme) *suffer* – in the sense that they lose force, credibility, dignity as objects of serious analysis – if they are straightjacketed into a traditionally modern, linear, progressive historiography because a modern, linear, progressive kind of ordering makes them lose their contours, their definition: as if we were trying to push a circle into a square. At the same time, these shapes, these mechanisms of postmodernity could be said to also suffer the moment they produce a theory or a historiography of themselves which *reproduces their very effects* in the telling, recounting, or analysing of such effects: something akin to pushing the circle into the very circle-shaped mould it came from, or to be even more postmodern, into a copy of it (!).

In an attempt – an attempt, I underline – to fall for neither of these strategies, to devise some sort of other route, I offer an affective historiography for postmodernity, mindful of shapes visible and invisible, mindful of delicate structures keeping substance together, mindful of *relocations, transmutations, crossfades* between *structures of feeling, modes of feeling, ways of looking*. The grouping of the three words – affect, historiography, postmodernity – would, I am conscious of this, make some schools of thought shudder. After all, postmodernity, in the eyes of many, isn’t allowed a historicity (let alone a historiography) because it isn’t allowed time: linear time has gone forever (as we all know, of course – although the adjective ‘forever’ still makes sense), and in flattened time, again as we all know, we are no longer able to distinguish the past from the future – although we still are born, grow old, and die. Affect, on the other hand, is supposed to be substituted in postmodernity, in

absolute depthlessness, by emotional ‘intensities’ which belong to a schizophrenic order⁴⁴. Fredric Jameson has observed (quite famously) that what was occurring in 1984 (but especially what would have occurred, prophetically) was the *waning of affect*. I am not alone in thinking that affect did not wane⁴⁵. On the contrary, I will spend most of my time arguing a *waxing of affect*⁴⁶: most of this work dwells on what Jameson calls ‘peculiar states of euphoria’⁴⁷ which in my view cannot simply be dismissed as not-affect. In fact, precisely classifying them as affect can allow us to understand what they are and what they do. And besides, if there is no distinction between high and low culture, then let’s keep dancing...

If not affect, depth, or time, then what? How are we to imagine the replacement of this old familiar cosmos of dread and elegy and Left Bank bistros with intense people blowing smoke in each other’s faces and gratuitously stabbing their hands with knives? No need to imagine it: it is here. It is the Postmodern.⁴⁸

An old familiar cosmos that sounds tremendously bourgeois, though. Strange how this debate keeps taking place at Left Bank bistros, *anyway*. Though maybe not at night, when

⁴⁴ Jameson, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.’ *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53 – 92. p. 61

⁴⁵ Pellegrini and Puar write: ‘Nor have Jameson’s fears about the waning of affect been realized, at least not in the terms in which he predicted affect’s demise. Indeed, it may be that this misdiagnosis has itself helped to generate or, more accurately, regenerate critical interest in the cultural politics and claims of affect. We could thus say, reading against the grain of Jameson’s linked essays, that he was in fact extraordinarily prescient about the growing centrality of theories of affect to conceptualizations of subjecthood, being, corporeality, and politics.’ Pellegrini, Ann and Puar, Jasbir. ‘Affect’. *Social Text* 27 (3-100): 35-38. p. 36

⁴⁶ When Jameson writes about the surfaceness of experience, he sees it more apt to invoke structures bound to the old idea of the sublime – this is of particular interest to me and to Mario Perniola, whose theses I will argue alongside here. I will return to this nexus of complexities regarding the surface and the sublime in a later chapter entitled *Surface Games and Side Effects*.

⁴⁷ Jameson, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.’ *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53 – 92. p. 64

⁴⁸ Latimer, Dan. ‘Jameson and Post-Modernism’. *New Left Review* 1/148, November-December 1984. p. 119

naked waiters set cocktails on fire for American girls, just a few doors down from Shakespeare & Co. At that darkest of hours, the traditional inhabitants of Left Bank bistros tend to retire to their apartments – which is a shame, because it means they never get to *see* what goes on, now, at Left Bank bistros. A diatribe comes to mind, involving Dick Hebdige, Fredric Jameson and Dan Latimer, fought out in various texts but beginning with an article of Latimer’s on the New Left Review in 1984. Latimer, who places himself between a rock and a hard place (not dissimilar to my own, but I think more impossible) writes, amongst many interesting turns, that ‘we cannot afford, says Jameson, the comfort of “absolute moralizing judgements” about Postmodernism. We are within it. We are part of it whether we like it or not. To repudiate it is to be reactionary – but to celebrate it unequivocally, complacently, is to be Dick Hebdige’⁴⁹. Latimer, who is attempting to follow the dots of Marxist thought on the radar of the year 1984 (which is really not 2014), produces this sentence which, although in my view it has spikes on all sides, seems to me to synthesise quite well how there are roadblocks on various historiographical, theoretical pathways. Roadblocks with various schools of thought guarding them and acting as sentinels, which vary enormously depending on country – part of the view from where I am standing is that the stance which Jameson inhabits *does* have a moral tone which seems to ‘protect’ Marxist thought by theorising an apocalypse.

⁴⁹ The original article is Latimer, Dan. ‘Jameson and Post-Modernism’. *New Left Review* I/148, November-December 1984. The case is followed up in Hebdige, Dick. ‘The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to *The Face*’ in Evans, J. and Hall, S. (eds) *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London: Sage, 1999. pp. 99-125. Here Hebdige writes, in a footnote, that ‘whilst agreeing with Jameson on the facticity of certain aspects of the post-modern condition, the present author would distinguish himself from the “Dick Hebdige” referred to here’ (p. 123). Hebdige seems to be arguing with Jameson; it’s actually Latimer he’s arguing against.

But is Jameson's work, to cite one example, the only 'third way' able to conjugate Marxist thought and postmodernity? Doesn't it do postmodernity a series of disfavours, all of which are troubling if indeed 'we are within it, we are part of it whether we like it or not'? The less celebrated but still quite well-nourished Hebdige school, which isn't quite the French school of Baudrillard and Lyotard, but which offers an anglophone (and hence also anglominded) kind of analysis, has a movement which, perhaps it is true, in order to do theory at all mimics the movement of postmodern culture in itself (of which, after all, it accepts that it is a part of). But does this obligatorily translate into 'unequivocal, complacent celebration'? Can we go elsewhere? Italy offered other third ways – in multiples of three – again roadblocked left, right, centre (quite literally). We shall encounter (perhaps even bribe!) various border guards as we go on, we shall attempt to get through some of these impasses. In some ways, the Italian debate on the postmodern (or the Italian row?) did everything it could to sweep under the carpet what it has already found.

Part of the issue is that postmodern cultural phenomena have a tendency to produce their own theory *anyway*, or to even *be* theory in the first place. So rather than the objects themselves requiring theorisation, it might be that their *sides* might have to be theorised: where they come from and how they act on their environment, on their spectators, on their observers; indeed, 'backgrounds to backgrounds', returning to Thrift. Their effects, more than their thingness in itself, strike me as a possibly more useful subject for inquiry. To return to Gernot Böhme and to his ideas on scenography, rather than taking a stance which enters on the defensive, convinced that these atmosphere-makers are surely out to trick us (which I suggest they may be, but only because they're libidinally invested in the labour of tricking

themselves too, and probably for good reason⁵⁰), an affective historiography attempts to trace back how and with what kind of materials these atmospheres are crafted, and why it was desirable to craft them, what they were called in to say, why they were necessary.

This operation, although it has within it also the aforementioned (modern) longing to ‘keep things still’, is bound to be a postmodern operation because it has to execute a series of steps which make it impossible to ‘stay outside’ of the object: it requires a ‘falling for it’ in the first place to afford the object its dignity as a resonant, atmosphere-producing thing, to take it seriously, to *feel* it. Then, it requires a knowledge, an attention, a care in handling the ‘emotional’ as well as conceptual fabric from which the object was crafted – a work of *interception* of what the work produced in the historical. Finally, it requires a will to dirty one’s hands and one’s thoughts with the ‘low’ in culture, with circulation in the popular, with a series of *emotions* which either in the historical then or in the historicised now may expose us to sentimentalism, to ignorance, to cheapness. It requires, in other words, that she who is doing the historiography doesn’t fall for the temptation to place herself ‘above’ her object: in doing so, certainly, she wouldn’t run the risk of getting absorbed by her object of inquiry herself. But is it worth it? Is it worth dismissing what I referred to earlier as ‘silly things’ and

⁵⁰ Again I want to draw attention to a turn: the idea of ‘being invested in the labour of tricking oneself’ is an affective stance we shall return to, which I would like to my reader to keep in mind.

‘little things’ in order to appear not silly or little myself? I’m more interested in looking after everything, in the meantime. *In the meantime*, and *just in case*⁵¹.

•

Taking care, looking after, paying attention, taking seriously: this thesis also, as is evident, has a need to respond to the Italian context – one in which postmodernity has never gone down very well, in which many aspects of work, of art, of society are still vehemently criticised everyday on the pages of newspapers, journals and magazines, for a series of reasons. This is also, of course, the context in which the New Spectacularity has largely been belittled or forgotten, although its present ‘cuspness’ affords it the odd day out – paid for, it has to be said, by my generation, which reaches its 30th birthday wondering why, as a society, we speak of the 1980s almost always in the logic of a precedent failure – and my work of course is also inscribed in this generational arc. So I insist on using these verbs – taking care, paying attention, taking seriously – also in order to respond to the Italian context ‘on the other side’. By this I mean that in this investigation I am attempting to use, to shift in time, to ‘adapt’ some of the methods and some of the intellectual energy of the Italian schools of

⁵¹ Taking care, looking after, paying attention. P.A. Skantze uses care and attention as methods in her work in *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*, and they are methods I am indebted to not only from reading the book, but from having been present for the making of that book and having had the pleasure of organically absorbing them. Care and attention are proposed by Skantze as methods for spectating, remembering, composing and are staged in her work as methods against flattening, reduction, rushing and breaking. They exist in gestures such as hesitating, eavesdropping, feeling her way through a city, a theatre, a scene. They translate into actions such as ‘tenderly lifting the boiling beaker to place it on the countertop’, inviting the reader to look together, being careful to keep the contours of her storytelling soft, trading, after Benjamin, ‘all her knowledge of artists’ quarters and princely palaces for the scent of a single weathered threshold or the touch of a single tile’. Skantze’s methods for taking care and paying attention blow through what I propose as an affective historiography. Skantze, P.A. *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*. New York: Punctum, 2013.

Marxist historiography in the (muscular, exacting) effort to stay on the side without falling off the edge, in the will and hope to not end up merely matching circles with circles. Undoubtedly related to, and partly engendered by, an Italian microhistoriographical approach⁵², an affective historiography settles on the aesthetic effects of all of those micro-events of which microhistory studies the social and political nature. Derived from the microhistoriographical conviction that a consideration of the detail, most notably the ordinary, administrative, quotidian and most often proletarian detail is where the devil is, it considers, of those details, the affective resonance in their world and figures out how they can be traced in their appearance, disappearance, reappearance through time.

An affective historiography *could* be seen as a declination of an historiography of the flâneur – but it cannot be *that* flâneur anymore. Some kind of motorised flâneur, after Thrift? Tony Molho opens an article about Carlo Ginzburg's historiographical work beyond the concept of *microstoria* with a quote from Walter Benjamin which also resounds here:

⁵² I intend here that my methods are indebted to those of the Italian school of 'microstoria' developed in the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s, epitomised by the work of Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg. Microstoria, in short, moves from the minuscule detail in order to access a wider récit. Levi and Ginzburg had spoken, in their first joint article on the subject in 'Quaderni Storici' in 1979, that what microhistory moved from was 'the method of clues': beginning an investigation from something 'odd', something that doesn't quite fit – and proceeding through detective work. While I cannot chart here the full extent of the influence of a microhistorical approach onto the work of this thesis, I do want to note that microhistory had a difficult relationship with postmodernism: the focus on the individual story was not to be read as 'individualistic'; the acknowledgement of the historian-as-detective was not intended as 'subjectivistic'; its empirical roots made it ring out of tune with the postmodern cultural landscape. Furthermore, Ginzburg has often cited the political unrest of the 1970s and his biographical experiences as the son of Jews in WWII as reasons underpinning his work: microstoria has its genesis firmly in the logic of an engaged Left. In 2009 Maurizio Gribaudi made an intervention entitled 'The long march of microhistory: from politics to aesthetics?' ('La Lunga Marcia della Microstoria: dalla politica all'estetica?' in *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*, ed. Paola Lanaro. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011) where, in my view, he sheds new light on some of these junctures. In theorising an affective historiography, I offer my attempt to conjugate some of the thorny threads regarding microhistory with a notion of 'postmodern engagement'.

Indeed, if one merely recalls that not only human beings and animals but also spirits and above all images inhabit, then it is abundantly clear what the flâneur is concerned with and what he seeks. Namely, images wherever they are housed. The flâneur is the priest of the genius loci. The inconspicuous passer-by with the dignity of the priest and the detective's sense of clues.⁵³

I would instinctively shy from the notion of describing myself as priestess and detective, nor am I exactly a 'passer-by'. I am, after all, here on purpose – I heard of this place, then looked for it on maps and then I drove here. I got lost a few times, and who knows if I'm exactly where I was heading? I had some photos, some names of streets, a couple of postcards but little else⁵⁴. In any case, I came here (wherever exactly I am) looking for something in particular (although I didn't know exactly what it looked like). I came to get something, to retrieve it, to stay with it and understand it: in the affective historiography I am not the 'passer-by' because I am performing *anamnesis* and not *mneme*, as Ricoeur would want me to stress⁵⁵. As is implicit in the very notion of *mneme*, I am also late, I have 'come after' the event, the scene, the show. So I am a 'latecomer' of sorts⁵⁶: the positions I have to

⁵³ Benjamin, Walter. 'Die Wiederkehr des flâneurs'. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III, 1972, 195 quoted in Molho, Tony, 'Carlo Ginzburg: Reflections on the intellectual cosmos of a 20th-century historian' in *History of European Ideas* 30 (2004) 121–148. p. 121

⁵⁴ Like Italo Calvino's city Maurilia, here I am invited to look at the city at the same time of old postcards of the city, and join the inhabitants in a certain nostalgia for how the provincial Maurilia used to be, a nostalgia which would be impossible if Maurilia hadn't turned to metropolis. Calvino, Italo. *Le Città Invisibili*. Turin: Einaudi, 1972.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, history, forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

⁵⁶ I borrow the 'latecomer' from Joe Kelleher in Kelleher, Joe. 'On Self-Remembering Theatres' [Sui Teatri Autorimembranti]. Ed. Gravano, Viviana, Pitozzi, Enrico and Sacchi, Annalisa. Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008.

⁵⁷ In the text cited above, à propos Gustav Metzger's work Kelleher writes: 'you have to crawl to encounter the image, and crawl over the representation in a way that's not going to be comfortable in any sense of the word, latecomer spectator that you are at the scene of other peoples' suffering.'

assume – my stances – are not always comfortable, ‘in any sense of the word’⁵⁷. In addition to this, I have the duty to keep moving – I have to keep moving in order to see⁵⁸.

Despite not quite being able to give myself the title of flâneur, though, an affective historiography also relies on absorbing something of those professions Benjamin refers to the flâneur, the detective and the priest. A strange pairing, perhaps – but an exact one: because if a certain amount of ‘priesting’ over the genius loci (and genius tempi) is required for an affective historiography to function, the fact that it takes place in the historical (the shift of Benjamin’s sentence above into a past tense) doesn’t turn it into a process of divination, of *clairvoyance*. An intercepting in the historical is at work, but as long as the priest stays handcuffed to the detective, the priest cannot turn into ‘medium’. We are talking about the past, not about the future.

The detective finds preterites, past simples, the language of clues, of ‘evidence’ – the priest’s work comes later, and has to do with understanding what the pasts continuous around those preterites (the background to the background?) might have been. Past continuous or, in other languages, imperfects: and an affective historiography is imperfect, indeed⁵⁹. Here, I invite into my discussion an essay about Gérard de Nerval’s short story *Sylvie*, in which Umberto Eco notes that the whole narration of *Sylvie* hangs on an imperfect, is carried by an imperfect, which stretches out like a carpet underneath all the other tenses supplying a sort of

⁵⁸ I shall return to the notion of ‘having to keep moving’, which I elaborate on from Georges Didi-Huberman and Denis Roche, in the chapter of this thesis entitled *Towards the Banal: Pasolini, Mendini and the Fireflies*. I mention it now because the fact of ‘having to keep moving’ has a rhythm which is not, alas, particularly flâneurish.

⁵⁹ We shall return to the concept of ‘imperfect’ in a few movements, where I shall again use the term but after Mike Pearson’s use of it in his ‘imperfect archeology’ of the Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam.

background buzz⁶⁰. Nerval's imperfect, as Eco also notes, is a very special one: the opening sentence of *Sylvie* is *je sortais d'un théâtre*, 'I was leaving a theatre'⁶¹. This, for Eco, places the entirety of *Sylvie* in a (typically flâneurish?) space between the city and representation, not only imperfect and hence not perfect / not concluded, and imperfect and hence continuous (if we look at not concluding on both sides), but also leaving a theatre and hence 'suspended', in a certain way, between the real and the unreal⁶². Let me align myself with that Nervalian imperfect: I am interested in working towards an attunement to that tense, towards the development of an ear that lends itself to hearing the imperfect, that settles on that frequency that ends in *-ais*, or in this case which ends in *-aient*, third person plural – not me, but them. To settle on that sound here matters not only because, in a sense, we were always leaving a theatre, and not only because it is a tense which supplies a 'background', but also because the imperfect, the past continuous, has imperceptible, undecided, invisible temporal limits: because unless we explicitly stop a past continuous, a past continuous never ends. Unless we arrived home, got onto a bus, met a friend, we were still leaving a theatre. We need ands, whens, thens to interrupt the temporal flow of the imperfect and if we don't, it just keeps ringing out. I propose an attention to the past continuous because it allows us to place, or at least attempt to place, the whens and the thens into a more mundane temporal expanse which may – microhistoriographically – tell us a lot about *modes of feeling* in the historical. I propose such a consideration of the unfinished tense also because I see it as a kind of

⁶⁰ Eco, Umberto in the preface to de Nerval, Gérard. *Sylvie*. trans. into Italian by Umberto Eco. Turin: Einaudi Scrittori Tradotti da Scrittori, 1999. p. 13

⁶¹ Nerval, Gérard. Incipit of *Sylvie*. Turin: Einaudi Scrittori Tradotti da Scrittori, 1999. p. 13

⁶² Eco, Umberto in the preface to de Nerval, Gérard. *Sylvie*. trans. into Italian by Umberto Eco. Turin: Einaudi Scrittori Tradotti da Scrittori, 1999. p. 13

translation of an important question I have inherited from Joseph Roach: ‘when students ask about the problems of reconstructing historical performances, I ask them: what evidence do we have that they ever died out?’⁶³.

The methods I am proposing here, then, are difficult, and always experimental, always open, imperfect indeed, but not *ridiculous*. The historiographer’s imagination – her ability to *make images* from the reticulate of images already known – offer hypotheses often uncertain, but not ‘made up’. Later in this study we will see a sort of cosmogony of images designed in 1984 by Societas Raffaello Sanzio: the text explains what happens to images as we produce them, and what happens to ‘our’ images after we die. Images, we are told, go and live over our head: ‘if yesterday you drank a glass of water, today the image of you drinking a glass of water will be a metre above your head. Tomorrow it will be two metres above your head’⁶⁴. This process, still according to Sanzio’s beautiful imagination, means that we all have a column of images hovering above our heads which contains everything we have ever done, seen and witnessed. When we die, our column breaks off just above our heads, and remains unanchored, floating in space – but those images don’t disappear. And, importantly, we don’t disappear: ‘we’re still in those images’⁶⁵.

While I am not suggesting that we use Sanzio’s science-fiction as a method for historiographical inquiry, we do have to understand that images (and hence their atmospheres, their pulviscule) don’t disappear: they move. An affective historiography has to know this and

⁶³ Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. p. xii

⁶⁴ Societas Raffaello Sanzio, *Kaputt Necropolis*. In ‘Magazzini 8’ (magazine). Milan: Ubu, 1985. pp. 173-189

⁶⁵ Ibid.

accept this beyond metaphor; and the archive helps it, because it proves that it is not just a metaphor. Images may hide, sometimes for a long time; sometimes they relocate to spheres so other that it becomes difficult to track them down. But, again beyond metaphor, repositories of images exist, images *survive*⁶⁶, and not only in archives – they survive in people. People are essential for an affective historiography.

In his 2001 study *An Anthropology of Images* German art historian Hans Belting puts forward the notion of images living – and hence transmitting, circulating, and, I add, surviving – in bodies, not in things, nor in images themselves. Belting writes, I quote, that ‘technological images have shifted the relationship between artefact and imagination in favour of imagination, creating fluid transitions for the free play of the mental images of their beholders’⁶⁷. What is referred to in this sentence as ‘imagination’ is not nothing and it is not fiction: it is the movements generated by and around the image, the image’s atmospherical (and hence affective, and hence sensorial) effects. Its ‘side effects’. According to Belting, the changing state of the image (changing in its current adventures in media and technology) ‘requires a spectator who is able to animate the media as though images were living things. Image perception, a form of animation, is a symbolic act that is guided by cultural patterns and pictorial technologies’⁶⁸.

Now, animation is not re-animation: this operation does not seek to awaken dead images from their eternal rest, for it refuses to believe that images die; it *does* however, ‘animate’ in

⁶⁶ I take the notion of survival directly from the work of Georges-Didi Huberman in his 2010 volume *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Trans. Chiara Tartarini. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010.

⁶⁷ Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton: PUP, 2008. p. 41

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 42

as much as it treats images, in Belting's words, as living things. An affective historiography thrives on an understanding that if images are embodied, then the transmission of those images can happen from body to body by atmosphere (which is also carried by words, which carry images, which spread abroad); this means that the body needn't be present. Sanzio's 'columns', so to speak, remain. Transmission can happen by *affect*, by an understanding generated in between types of knowledge, in between types of information, in between types of disciplines⁶⁹.

Yet I halt for a moment, with a note of caution on in-betweens, an ache in the background, a fear: an affective historiography does not seek to happen in the in-between, but everywhere, for, from where it is standing, the in-between *is* everywhere. Its locations are different declinations of the in-between: the not-anymore, the nonetheless, the in spite of, the never was, the might have been. But aren't all of these in-betweens effectively all-arounds, and hence, effectively, 'everywheres'? 'In the air' is the space between us, but is air not required for the transmission of all information, for any voice to be heard?

An affective historiography wishes (at least wishes) to refuse the notion of, or more accurately the *language* of the in-between a priori and programmatically: for the language of the in-between strikes me as producing a rhetoric of vulnerability which makes the affective (the residue, the delicate analysis, the slippery substance) slip between the train and the

⁶⁹ In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, 'An Inventory of Shimmers'. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg offer a compelling description of affect's capacity to move in 'swerves and knottings' between types of knowledge and forms of inquiry. London: Duke, 2010. pp. 5-7

platform edge⁷⁰. Is it not a collection of in-betweens that makes up the everywhere? There is something *soft* about the rhetoric of the in-between which unpowers it: a challenge which pulses in the background of this project is one which has to do with a will to ‘re-power’ the in-between; which is, of course, an attempt to ‘re-power’ a vulnerability. A challenge picked up as in a torch relay from certain experiments in Italy in the early 1980s: in my study of this period, I have seen – and we will see – various instances in which powerful ideas – ‘soft’, yes, because complex – have suffered (I use the verb ‘to suffer’ again, as I did for postmodern shapes earlier on) from their own complexity-becoming-softness, indeed from their ‘vulnerable passionality’. Suffering, etymologically, is to take upon oneself, to carry a load. Carrying a load is exhausting, it burns us out: we end up flattened, between the object we are carrying and the ground. We end up in the in-between – so the in-between needs to be ‘strong’, somehow, to lift itself up, we need to breathe some air into it; it needs to lose some ‘weakness’⁷¹.

Part of the political movement of the Neo-Spectacular theatre consisted of a passage, which I will describe in some detail later, from the underground to the overground, from the basement to the rooftop. This is a strategy for survival, a refusal to believe that the

⁷⁰ In the same text, Seigworth and Gregg write that ‘affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*. The term “force”, however, can be a bit of misnomer since affect need not be especially forceful (although sometimes, as in the psychoanalytic study of trauma, it is). In fact, it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed.’ While my reader will certainly see how it would be absurd for me to unbind my work from such a proposition after such insistence on intensities, molecular events and the unnoticed, I do however wish to register my concern with the untangling of affect from the word ‘force’ (or with the binding of force and affect only in the case of trauma). I use the image of the train because it seems to me to synthesise the problem well: yes the in-between is between the train and the platform, but if that gap weren’t there the whole machinery would grind to a halt.

⁷¹ ‘Weakness’, a word central to the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo, will return in various incarnations throughout this thesis.

underground cannot come out into the light; in fact it is two refusals rolled into one: refusal to stay hidden, to be swept aside, and at the same time refusal to be ‘absorbed’ by dominant discourses, mainstreams and moral majorities by daring to come out. These refusals blow through this investigation: an affective historiography seeks to unbind affect from its interstitial positions because it fears the language of the interstitial; aligned with the sideline, wedded to the edge, an affective historiography has a duty to prove that edges have no end⁷².

•

As I move towards concluding and beginning, and as the shadow of Barthes looms over me as I speak of edges, let me return to Benjamin’s unlikely pair of friends and collaborators, to the detective and the priestess, to make one last turn towards this affective historiography. I have spoken of animation: I will speak of animation time and again; or, more precisely, I will speak (more precisely still: I will write) *by animation*. The language this project is made of is a language which, in knowing its limitations in being ‘only words’, nonetheless attempts to ‘animate’ on the other side, on this side of the calendar, for we who read and write: it attempts to bring about, it attempts to *spread abroad*. The language employed, after various attempts towards (and still an attempt towards) a language for an affective historiography uses itself as a vehicle for the very scenes we haven’t seen, becomes its object, the object it is writing

⁷² ‘by which it must be understood that they always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. Culture thus recurs as an edge: in no matter what form’. Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. p. 7. For the purposes of this investigation, I would like to think of edges, not of in-betweens – or of in-betweens as edges. Why assume that the limits of the gap are given or already known?

about. It attempts, again, not to ‘make alive’, to re-animate, but to make available to its reader its own textual, historiographical, pulviscular embodiment: the knowledge of an affective historiography is knowledge that is embodied by she, and we, who were not there. It is writing, in one form or another, that attempts to make the embodiment of past knowledge possible: bits of writing from the archive, bits of tone, fragments of octaves, specks of dust. The writing I will attempt here dwells precisely in structures of feeling – in the glitches that appear in the image, in language, in sentiment as one style morphs into another. As such, this work is also an experiment in devising a language which attempts to pass on affective substance. ‘Neurotically’ perhaps, in Barthes’ words: in the sense that it has to ‘prove to you’ that it wants to be read⁷³; shifting Barthes’ neurosis into Pasolini’s realm, we could say that it wants to be understood, and wants its object to be understood with it⁷⁴. It doesn’t beg you, the reader, to come close, to shift position; nor will it come crashing into you, fear not – it begs you to look where we’re looking together⁷⁵, to feel where we’re feeling together and as such, it is not a performance. You are not watching me, we are watching something else; we are watching *it*. Maybe, we are watching *them*. In any case, an affective historiographical writing is not performative writing, but writing about performance.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ In *Poesia in Forma di Rosa* Pasolini writes: ‘death is not in not being able to communicate, but in not being able to be understood’.

⁷⁵ Again the fact of ‘looking together’ is a Skantzian methodological gesture. In this affective economy it is important because it seems to me to remind us of how spectatorship *spreads abroad* in the recounting and telling by animation. Skantze, P.A. *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*. New York: Punctum, 2013.

Interlude: Everything that Italy –

I stumble here. I don't know how to conjugate my verbs. Truly a clasp, if time were a necklace, between one moment and another, almost between one country and another, the Italian late 1970s and early 1980s appear murky and unsettled: the years of lead, the reflux, the years of mud (i). Pre-industrial and post-industrial cultures (ii). Passages from *humus* to *eros* (iii) in the 'obsolete medium of the theatre' (iv). The new wave, the new mood (v). And meanwhile: the village and the city, the provincial, the metropolitan (vi). Engagement, disengagement (vii). Armed subversion, drug abuse, yuppiedom (viii). Marxism, postmodernism. A horror veined with tomorrows (ix). The generation of candour, the generation of terror (x). What was before isn't anymore. A generational thing (xi).

Everything that Italy was becoming and everything that Italy – everything that Italy *what*, exactly? How do we know, how do we get to single out what the 'everything' was, and how can we choose our tenses? If the 1970s were a missed opportunity and the 1980s were a failure, how can we theorize the space which led from a missed opportunity to a failure? We make films, we write books (xii); we use the sentence *the way we were*. But we weren't *one way* – this story has been simplified (xiii). Let us investigate the moment in which something got broken, damaged, stolen. The moment 'just before' and the moment 'just after'. Let's investigate the short-circuit, the grey area, the crossfade, the spasm. Not the in-between but the intermittent (xiv).

We can say that the late 1970s were the tail end of the 1970s and that the early 1980s were the beginning of the 1980s but of course, they weren't. Time is not a film you can take scissors to; the theatre is certainly not a film you can take scissors to. The late 1970s and early

1980s – two decades so different in tone, in mood, in essence – are *connected* here, not *separated*. The grammar of the *present* reveals itself as *imperfect*. There's a reason for this: it's because we haven't *finished*.

The terms above qualified with Roman numerals refer to instances of the Italian historical and cultural context on the cusp of the 1980s and to 'backgrounds to the background' of this investigation, as well as to present debates on the period.

These are expanded on below in sections numbered with those Roman numerals. I offer these numbered sections not as a glossary, but as a sort of 'rough guide' to the environment we are about to enter – some, by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless useful information.

I invite the reader to make use of these notes following their own rough guide-reading preference: some travellers pre-read them, others consult them as they travel, some glance over them on the plane, others don't even read them until they return.

This interlude ends, and the following chapter begins, on page 65.

- i. **'Years of lead'**, *anni di piombo*, is the expression normally used to designate the years which saw the most widespread use of terrorist methods in extra-parliamentary Italian politics, methods which included, but were not limited to, bomb attacks, political assassinations, massacres, riots, armed subversion, kidnappings and informal executions. Giovanni Pellegrino, the president of a parliamentary commission instituted years later to investigate the events defined the period as 'a low intensity civil war'. There is no political colour to the years of lead: the 'lead' was consumed both on the extreme right and on the extreme left, taking many other victims in shades in-between, although it begins with the extreme right's so-called 'strategy of tension'. The years of lead include a period that goes roughly from the late 1960s to the early 1980s: beginning with a series of episodes in Rome and Milan between 1968 and 1969 (the most prominent being the fascist bomb attack in Piazza Fontana in Milan in 1969) and ending with the bomb attack (again fascist) on Bologna station on August 2nd 1980, which killed 85 people. Smaller-scale attacks did of course continue to take place for some years thereafter. The large majority of the deaths of the years of lead were caused by right-wing extremism; although

there were many left-wing armed subversion groups active across Italy at this time, the kidnapping and consequent execution ‘by popular tribunal’ of the Demochristian President of the Republic Aldo Moro in May 1978 – operated by the Red Brigades – was perhaps the most shocking of left-wing terrorist actions. All of these events should be taken in the context of what was referred to, in parliament, as the ‘historical compromise’, which softened the edges between Demochristians and Communists (the former wanted to protect the government from neo-fascist tendencies; the latter wanted to slacken its ties with the Soviet Union). The left-wing **77 Movement**, which will be called into question often in this investigation, was not affiliated with the Red Brigades or with armed subversion more generally: its demise post-77 is also due to the Red Brigades’ line, from which many wanted to distance themselves. Nevertheless, in the post-Moro months, many exponents of the 77 Movement (anti-fascists, workerists, intellectuals) were suppressed, and often incarcerated, by the authorities (see the prison sentences of, amongst others, Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi and Toni Negri). Berardi wrote about it like this in 2004: ‘at the end of the decade of the 1970s, any anti-work behavior was accused, criminalised, and removed (...) the realism of capital regained the driver’s seat, accompanied by the triumph of neo-liberal policies. The capitalist counter-offensive began, social life became once again subjected to productivity, financial competition became sanctified as the only possible form of progress’ (Berardi, Franco. *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero*. Derive Approdi, 2004).

‘**Reflux**’ / ‘Reflux towards the private’ is a rarer, less historically fortunate term, but still very important in the logic of this investigation: it began to be used around 1980, notably around the 1980 Fiat Mirafiori protest in Turin known as the ‘March of the 40,000’, which was seen as the first public outing of a ‘silent majority’ which wanted a return to normality after the vicissitudes which had been shaking the Mirafiori Fiat factory – and Italy – for months. The march was relatively quiet, at times even silent; it included the wives and children of the workers, as well as higher ranking Fiat employees; there were banners on the march with slogans such as ‘we want negotiation, not the death of Fiat’ – the march marked a distinct change of tone. The term ‘reflux’ continues to be used more broadly to describe a movement towards the private, the quiet, the normal, even from ‘ideology to sentiment’, as it was described by Pierluigi Battista in *Corriere della Sera* in 2009, in an article titled ‘1980, the year of the reflux when we became modern’ (22nd November 2009). The reflux is the time of this investigation.

‘**Years of Mud**’ is a term used initially used by historian Indro Montanelli to describe the

1980s, notably after the election of Bettino Craxi as PM in 1983 – it alludes to the deepening corruption within the political system which eventually lead to the ‘Tangentopoli’ affair and the ‘Clean Hands’ court case, to the end of the First Republic, which saw the fall of the two main Italian parties since the war (PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano* and DC, *Democrazia Cristiana*), and to the start of the Second, with the rise of Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party in the 1994 general elections.

- ii. Many have described a shift **from pre-industrial to post-industrial** occurring in Italy in the years between **1978** and **1984**. The shift, as in any shift from pre to postindustrial, is societal as well as economical; what is novel in the Italian scenario, according to most analysts and historians, is the speed at which the transformation occurred. As media historian Peppino Ortoleva, whose work we shall return to, writes ‘while Italy in the mid-1970s was a largely pre-industrial country, by the mid 1980s it was organised according to structures which are typical of post-industrial societies – in a few years Italy went through a change which took other countries decades’. Ortoleva writes this about Ermanno Olmi’s film *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978): ‘the image of the 1970s as “years of lead” is that of a hyper-politicised and violent phase, destined to be surpassed by a long period of **disengagement**, **privatisation** and **giving up on utopia**. This image, rooted in common sense, effectively hides the *processes* which were at work between the late ‘70s and the early ‘80s and which truly determined the modernization of our country’ (Ortoleva, Peppino in *Ermanno Olmi: il cinema, la televisione, la scuola*. Ed. A. Aprà. Venice: Marsilio, 2003. p. 184). Italy, though, is large; it is also long and thin: crossfades happen at different rhythms depending on what part of the country you observe them from. We are talking about mores, habits, culture more than we are about industry; if we understand that while Milan, in the early 1980s, was beginning to live off **advertising** and **fashion** while most of Italy’s production was still **agricultural**, if we insert into this situation an incredible flourish of mass media (notably of private **television** channels), we can better understand the phenomenon we will be referring to as ‘**metropolitan**’: it is a **mode of feeling which in most cases pre-dates the socio-cultural situation it is nevertheless engendered by**.
- iii. **From humus to eros**. I choose to single out this expression used by a member of Magazzini Criminali, Sandro Lombardi, in his correspondence with myself over the years 2011-2012. I put to him a sentence written to me by another member of the group, Marion D’Amburgo, who had written: ‘After 1968, we coincided with and represented the radical mutation which was happening in our generation – we were *enfants terribles* and we

didn't quite understand to what extent signs converged in our theatre. Society had changed so radically, and technology had moved so fast that our approach to reality changed as a result (...). The truth is that we had been ripped out of our original culture so violently that something within us had broken; this pushed us into a **diffused nostalgia**, an acute awareness of a sense of loss'. Lombardi added: 'I agree with everything Marion says – and it's true that we came from rural Tuscany, and from what was mostly a peasant culture... but it wasn't only sociological. Between **1979** and **1980** we truly experienced a shift, how can I put it, from *humus* to *eros*: it was as if, to use a theatrical metaphor, we had changed our gels. The way we looked at things changed, the colour of things'. Lombardi seems to be speaking also of a diffusion – of a sort of dematerialization, a becoming undone from the soil, a sense of becoming less and less 'attached' and more and more *pulviscular*. The artists' translation here of the concept of pre to post-industry strikes me as particularly acute, and particularly useful in terms of understanding the *sentimental* transition accompanying a wider socio-cultural change.

- iv. **Obsolete** is how Oliviero Ponte di Pino terms the medium of the theatre in his *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti* (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988). Ponte di Pino does this in the introduction, where he also uses the expression **a grammar of the present** as well as **appropriation of the present** to describe the intents (creative, aesthetic, philosophical, political) of the Neo-Spectacular groups. I am indebted to the extremely perceptive juxtaposition of **obsolete** and **present**, which blows through this thesis and has animated some of its stance. I quote the original passage: 'in a country whose social fabric changed radically over only a few years, a real anthropological mutation took place, a weave of fugues forward and returns to the forgotten, with, often, tragic consequences. And this is maybe a key to understanding the choice of an obsolete medium like the theatre: this generation reached maturity after 1968, and the theatre became a place where it was possible to live out these mutations and their consequences (...). There is a **pathetic note** in this (...) an **unavoidable paradox** in choosing to face modernity (to the point of even simulating its mechanisms) but to choose to do so by using an 'old' medium like the theatre (...) there's an unresolved ambiguity in deciding to reflect on the society of the image and on mass communications by measuring such phenomena on the concreteness of the body and in the often marginal spaces new theatre companies tend to inhabit'. Ponte di Pino and I had lunch in Milan in January 2012, chicken salads. I said that what I wanted to discuss with him was a possible political core of 1980s work – he said that was because I was *una ragazza romantica*. So be it.

- v. **‘New Mood’** is how Remo Ceserani, US- and Italy-based Italian literary theorist who has dedicated many of his intellectual efforts to Italian postmodernism, describes the postmodern in one of his articles, and asks some generative questions which underpinned my work here from the beginning: ‘how is it that Italy is, most likely, the country that has plunged into the age of Postmodernity with the greatest ease (...); how is it that in many areas of life, from **architecture** to **interior design**, from **industrial design** to **fashion**, from **television shows** to **the most outrageous new life styles**, Italy has been so ready to adapt to the new mood and has contributed so eagerly to fashion it; how is it that, on the other hand, Italian **intellectuals** and literary critics are so **inflexible in their refusal to recognize** the new trend and to give it some credit or simply describe it?’ (Ceserani, R. ‘Modernity and Postmodernity: a Cultural Change Seen from the Italian Perspective’. *Italica*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Autumn 1994), pp. 369-384. p. 374). Turns in this investigation intend to offer answers to Ceserani’s questions; turns in this investigation are in conversation with some of the answers that Ceserani himself has formulated. I am also particularly attuned to the word **‘mood’** – once again it seems to me to be playing in the field of **affects, atmospheres, sensibilities, modes of feeling**.
- vi. **The provincial and the metropolitan.** I halt on this geographical situation which, in some ways, supplies a sort of parallel to the temporal situation of preindustrial and postindustrial Italy – it supplies a parallel to it because it is as **‘crossfading’** as the first. Landscapes at this time begin to melt and **sprawl** in particularly complex ways – tales of the province and the city, of **belltowers** and **skyscrapers in the same panorama**, are central to this work.
- vii. **‘Engagement’** is a constant thorn in the side of public discourse around postmodernity in Italy, as noted by Ceserani, Monica Jansen, and many others. The question of the public intellectual beckons, and it’s a thorny one. Some of the most interesting contributions to the matter come from Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussnug in their edited collection *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009). Nestled amongst a series of important and refreshing points made by the authors in their introduction to the book, they choose to recall a quote from Italo Calvino (recalled, itself, by Jennifer Burns in her *Fragments of Impegno*): ‘today, in general, when we speak of *engaged literature* (...) we speak of a literature which illustrates a thesis already formulated outwith poetic expression. Whereas what used to be called engagement, *impegno*, **can jump out at any level**: here I especially want to

imagine it as **image, word, impulse, manner, style, nonchalance, defiance.**' (Calvino, Italo. *Saggi*. Ed. M. Barenghi. Milan: Mondadori, 1999. p. 192).

- viii. **Metropolitan Characters...** This, of course, is a simplification, but one which reflects what we have seen referred to a page back as 'an image rooted in common sense which effectively hides some of the processes' which transformed the country. Those three social categories – **activists, addicts, yuppies** – coexist in this investigation because they coexist in Italian space and time between the late 1970s and early 1980s. This makes for a very varied, extremely mixed and often very strange panorama; not for the characters themselves, but **for the affective stances these characters bring with them**: a push into the future and a destruction of the past. Many of the 'stances' formulated across this thesis, many of the social, political, affective positionings described, studied and formulated as positionings in this thesis are the result of the clashing of these various ways of understanding a present which now, of course, is past.
- ix. **A Horror veined with Tomorrows.** The Critic Giuseppe Bartolucci used this sentence once to describe the work of Antonio Syxty; I find the expression particularly resonant, again for the 'stance' it describes which, similarly to Ponte di Pino's comment about **obsolescence**, can be stretched more widely out of the theatre and into larger **generational** debates on the cusp of the 1980s: 'Antonio Syxty says he finds himself in a limit-area where it seems **everything is already lost**, where everything is exhibited because of horror; it must be added, however, that Syxty's horror is veined with futurity, and that his lost belongs to a cataclysm. (...) It isn't paradoxical, then, to speak of **candour**: because all the passages are fluid and all the lines vanish; and the words narrate **a nostalgia and a demolition at the same time**; and the actors are both mannequins and choreographers, halfway **between satisfaction and suffering**.' (Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Review for *Famiglia Horror* (1982), reprinted in the programme notes for *Famiglia Horror* and published in Bertoldo, Mino. OutOff: 1978-2008. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008. p. 118)
- x. **Candour and terror.** Alberto Ronchey was a moderate socialist, longtime journalist for *Corriere della Sera*, expert in Russian affairs and also, in the 1990s, minister of culture under two governments. In the 1970s he was in good company in despairing at 'the generation', which he saw 'suspended between candour and terror' as the calendar of the 1970s crawled by. His analysis pertains to what Antonello and Mussgnug, and I second them, would describe as 'apocalyptic' (a widespread tone in Italy now and then); it is also a good photograph of what a moderate majority might have been thinking at the time of

the generation that interests us here: ‘unlike traditional society, which conserved itself, modern industrial society tends towards a constant self-destabilisation. Because of **territorial and social mobility**. Because of its own **technology**. Because of the explosive force of its own system of mass-media – the **suggestive power of autonomous television and radio** (Bologna’s Radio Alice and the emotional force of a voice saying: “Time: 12.15, let’s burn the trams, let’s burn everything”). Because of the masses imprisoned in universities, isolating a lengthened adolescence in a closed-circuit. (...) Today in Italy we have the **European myth of consumption without European consumption levels** (maximising inflation), the myth of widespread higher education without the appropriate resources or the jobs to sustain it (maximising alienation), the myth of employment without the structures to support it (maximising the isolation of the proletariat) and many other myths. Italian society thus swings between **delay** and **anticipation**, between the lowest production in the European community and the most demanding and ingenious theories of need.’ (Ronchey, Alberto. *Libro Bianco dell’Ultima Generazione*. Milan: Garzanti, 1978. p.120-121)

- xi. ***Talking about Generations***. I refer again to Enrico Palandri’s book about the novelist Pier Vittorio Tondelli. Although it tells the story of Tondelli and of his friendship with Palandri, the book has a generational aspect (an aspect very present in both writers’ work in any case). Palandri begins his narration like this: ‘the idea of **revolution**, which held together real everyday **engagement** against the obscurantist aspects of society, which lead to formulating new behaviours and new ideas, (...) has recessed into utopia, and can no longer conjugate private and public life. (...) Even on those like Pier, who only had marginal contact with revolutionary environments, the climate of those choices had a lasting effect. The feeling that our great dreams of the time had shrunk to the size of professional ambitions gave the sense of a cultural horizon in which childhood and adolescence seemed never-ending. **Our generation inhabits a space in between these two areas**, and in this little book I have tried to trace its physiognomy. **The line that emerges is not straight.**’ (Palandri, E. *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2005.)
- xii. ***Talking about generations (again)***. If Palandri’s generation swung between the large scale of great dreams of revolution and the pettier landscape of mere professional ambitions, if they inhabited that generational space, my generation tends to be seen as one which, in Palandri’s own words from the same text, ‘the word politics has no meaning other than the job of those who cover administrative positions’. Meanwhile, though,

something has happened to both of our generations: we coexist looking back, but we coexist on different planes. Over the past ten years or so there has been – this is most notable in the cinema, but also in literature – a **resurgence in interest in the 1970s**, which seem to have lost some of their patina of terror to give way to an idealised image as the ‘last decade of engagement’; a resurgence operated mostly by those who, indeed, reached maturity after 1968. As Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O’Leary (and many of their contributors) observe in their edited volume *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009* (London: MHRA, 2009), this is due to various reasons: the lack of an organic public discourse surrounding many of the events of the 1970s, the delays (sometimes decades-long) inherent in the Italian justice system, the thickening secrecy of the years of mud and the alleged progressive disengagement of Italian society over the course of the two decades of Berlusconi governments all contribute to the rise of **narratives which have shaped themselves independently of fact**, to ‘**memorialisations without memory**’, to **conspiracy theories**, to **nostalgic elaborations** – ‘**nostalgia of action**’, as Gianluigi Simonetti has described it (‘Nostalgia dell’azione: La fortuna della lotta armata nella narrativa italiana degli anni Zero’, appeared in *Allegoria* no. 64, Spring 2012).

My generation, which is beginning to write and make now, responds to this ‘gap’ (the lapse which jumps back to the 1970s) by, timidly for now but I expect more prominently as time goes on, **asking questions about the 1980s**, attempting to understand the memory of those years. Even over the four years of this investigation the situation has changed: there has been a flourishing of books, films, studies, notably about more marginal, underground or experimental practices of the Italian 1980s, some of which are mentioned in my own study here. I get a clear sense, from the present, that my generation is searching for clues which can overthrow the image of the 1980s as a decade of ‘disengagement, privatisation and a sense of giving up on utopia’ and of our generation as one for which the word politics no longer means anything: a recuperation is occurring, which seeks to **intercept forms of resistance** and hence **complicate the story of a decade** which has suffered from existing in the post-.

- xiii. An ‘**over-simplification**’ is what has occurred with the debate on postmodernism and postmodernity in Italy, according to perhaps the most pioneering of its theorists, Monica Jansen, and to many who have built upon her work (Jansen, Monica. *Il Dibattito sul Postmoderno in Italia*. Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002). This over-simplification is what has, according to Jansen and to others, determined the **controversial reception** of such concepts. At various turns throughout this investigation I will illuminate the ‘over-

simplifying route' before embarking on more complex pathways I have designed to understand the work of the New Spectacularity in its context. While building on the work of Jansen, Antonelli, Ceserani, and others cited throughout, what I attempt to offer here is three 'new' stances: **(a).** a detailed analysis of postmodernism and the theatre, in a panorama in which most efforts have been concentrated on cinema and literature. **(b).** the involvement of 'voices off' whose theorisations have, to a large extent, disappeared from the canon of Italian postmodernity but whose 'other' dialectical stances illuminate concepts which strike me as crucial (the philosophical output of **Mario Perniola** from the late 1970s onwards, which runs throughout this thesis, is largely absent from most work on Italian postmodernity; some of the texts I make great use of, such as **Tondelli's** 'chronicles' – which are recently being rediscovered – and the theoretical writings of the architect **Alessandro Mendini** – which, to my knowledge, are not). **(c).** derived from (b)., the elaboration of an '**affective positioning**' which strikes me as **complex and easily dismissible** yet vital to an understanding of the New Spectacularity and of Italian postmodernity more generally. There are also, I add, a lot of **lyrics** in this investigation: the postmodern pop song, truly a genre of its own in Italian music of this time, is another area which has been largely neglected; its existence as a 'scene' is often in intimate conversation with performance, and a careful listen shows that there are acute theorisations nestled in amongst the lyrics.

- xiv. '**Intermittence**' is an important concept in the economy of this investigation; it has been crucial to me in shaping the ways I have conducted this study and it is crucial in the way I choose to present my findings. I use it after **Georges Didi-Huberman**, who uses it after **Denis Roche**, both of whom are using it in response to **Pier Paolo Pasolini's** '**Article of the Fireflies**'. 'Intermittence', following from the contributors listed above, has delineated itself as a form of **delicate resistance**. Even, much earlier, Leonardo Sciascia, in his short, quick, fiery text written in the wake of Aldo Moro's kidnap and execution, *L'Affaire Moro*, uses the metaphor of the fireflies: at the start of the text he writes to Pasolini, who had died three years earlier, and informs him that in the wake of Moro's death he saw fireflies in his Sicilian home. Pasolini's theorisation of the disappearance of the fireflies has mostly informed a series of denials of that disappearance: a host of voices that have said 'no, look, it isn't true', a host of voices I wish to join in my own work. **Intermittence** also describes a particular kind of **dialectical set-up**: a set-up in which things may not be visible and which, hence, requires a manufacturing of other ways of seeing – involving strategies such as moving, dimming the lights, squinting, repositioning ourselves.

Was becoming, almost became, didn't become:

some Observations on the Unhappened as historiographical category

Sometime in the Autumn of 2010 I received an email from one of the many internet alerts I have set up over the years informing me that a video of Krypton's *Corpo* in its 1983 Villa Borghese performance had been uploaded onto an Italian theatre database. This meant that I was about to see one of my first pieces of New Spectacularity, which was not something I was expecting so early in the process – I made myself a coffee and turned the lights off. The video, uploaded by an anonymous user, is thirty-nine minutes long; for the first thirty or so it's almost completely dark. Mind, the music's great. An outline of a what I think is a male body appears at times, for a few seconds, in the half-light; then a laser outline of an (other? the same?) male body shines brightly on what I imagine is the back of the playing space. For seven or so minutes at the end the scene is visible: lights shine in sequence from the stage, illuminating a foil-clad body which moves slowly between various penumbras, accompanied by a driving synthline. Blackout, applause⁷⁶.

At the time of viewing this (of fiddling with the contrast and the exposure to no avail, of squinting and enlarging the image on my computer) I was preoccupied but also amused by how dark the video was, by how little it yielded. This viewing also confirmed something, an intuition, for me: I had read a book and various accounts of Krypton's performances, and had wondered where the heart of their work lay – what actually *happened* on stage? The photos, the comments, the critics had given me the impression that Krypton's works were almost *son et lumière* pieces, successions of video-gamey fantasies. As an Italian proverb goes, 'all

⁷⁶ Krypton, *Corpo*. Villa Borghese, 1983. (video recording). Accessible at e-theatre.it.

smoke and no roast'. Of course I refused to believe this – I am a longtime advocate of the idea that smoke *is* roast. In addition to and apart from personal ideological convictions, something I *had* understood at this early stage was that if I started talking about postmodern clichés such as the one on display here unquestioningly, or without taking them seriously – a sort of Kraftwerkian neo-classicism, we could say in review language – then I would a priori subtract myself from a 'duty of care' for my subject of analysis. I did, nonetheless, wonder: *is that all there is?* Watching the video also made me wonder if that was all there was. The two impressions matched though, and surely this meant *something* – it meant that *this* was where some sort of work should happen. *If that's all there is, my friend, then let's keep dancing*⁷⁷.

Watching it back over the years other impressions have summed themselves to the first: the experience of watching Krypton's *Corpo* is, in fact, quite typical. It is quite typical of this archive and it is probably quite typical of all archives – archives carry so little of what there was and besides, I was not pure at heart enough to enter an archive of performance undaunted by the many debates which have agitated, and still agitate, the tempestuous sea of performance studies. Nevertheless, that question of Peggy Lee's (what is it with Peggys and the ephemeral?) helped me: *is that all there is?* Peggy (Lee) refuses to answer that question either way: she refuses to abdicate to 'belief' (she's 'not ready for that final disappointment') but she also doesn't want to give into a stance of absolute cynicism. *If that's all there is*, she concludes, then let's keep dancing: you have no way of knowing if this is it, so you may as well. There's something 'in the meantimey', 'nonethelessy', in all of this⁷⁸ – and meantimes

⁷⁷ Lee, Peggy. 'Is that all there is?' on *Is That All There is?* Capitol Records, 1969.

⁷⁸ A certain affective-political positioning which I will go on to describe in the second part of this thesis as 'compassionate pessimism', an expression adapted from Lauren Berlant's 'cruel optimism' and crafted from the affective stances of Alessandro Mendini, Dick Hebdige and Pier Paolo Pasolini, amongst others.

and nonethelesses strike a chord with the Italian 1980s. For the scope of this discussion now, Peggy Lee's conclusion seems to me to perform two gestures from which we can take something: one intensely liberating (but sad), and one intensely destabilising (but invigorating). The first: yes, this is what we have in the archive, this is what we have to work on. *So be it*. Either you give up or you get on with it – so you get on with it. The second is in two parts. Part one of two: let's say that this is all there is – let's say this is all there *was*. Is that *disappointing*? If so, how? And why – what is it we wanted? Part two of two: asking 'is that all there is' opens the door onto illuminating the same question from the other side – *is that all there isn't?*

A couple of years later, as part of the series of archival events which make up the background of this thesis, I encountered a performance by Antonio Syxty called *Gas Station* or *Stazione di Benzina con Leggero Vento* ('Gas Station with Soft Breeze') in the artist's own archive. A particular sense of euphoria accompanied this discovery because in the accounts I had read of his work there had never been a mention of this particular piece. Syxty, with a certain nonchalance, told me that he never did it, because he couldn't find a gas station that would let him do it; having said as much, he continued to show me a series of other projects that never happened, including scripts for another two (potentially electrifying) pieces entitled *Cargo* and *Cargo 1900*⁷⁹. Even more destabilisingly, he tells me he thinks there should be some sort of film of one of those somewhere – a film, then, of a performance that didn't take place. We cannot afford to be purists. He means some sort of film-version, some sort of sketch, some sort of trailer – of course, I know that's what he means. But let us think about

⁷⁹ Syxty, Antonio. *Cargo* and *Cargo 1900*. Unpublished archival material.

what this means. Let us think, that is, about what the trace of something that didn't happen does to 'everything that did'.

•

In *Theatre / Archeology*, Mike Pearson writes:

The documentation of everyday detail in the construction of archives of clues and cases creates a kaleidoscope of hybrid fictions and competing perceptions – a richly sedimented environment of secret lives, lies and stories. The end is not normally the 'truth' of 'what happened'. Many serious crimes go unsolved and, anyway, the juridical event is a legal argument. There are miscarriages of justice, and can we ever know the mind of a criminal?⁸⁰

In our world of detectives and priests, Pearson's use of crime-related language (Pearson too is working from Benjamin) works well. And what Pearson articulates here is an anxiety which echoes throughout the study of theatre (and indeed, archeology) and its tempting, and after all responsible, positioning: there is something like a habit for a certain language ('and, anyway...', 'and can we ever...?') in Pearson, but also in Philip Auslander, in Amelia Jones, in Rebecca Schneider as well as others⁸¹. We have learned to question archives, for what they present, for how they present, for how they think. We have learned to 'animate' them by treating them as performances in themselves – and Schneider has questioned whose

⁸⁰ Pearson, Mike. *Theatre / Archeology*. London: Routledge, 2001. p. 62

⁸¹ I refer here to the following articles in particular: Auslander, Philip. 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation.' *PAJ* 84, MIT Press, September 2006; Jones, Amelia. "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation'. *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century (Winter, 1997), pp. 11-18 and Schneider, Rebecca. "Performance remains." *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001): 100-108.

performance the archive is, ‘anyway’: returning to Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, she chooses to remind herself (remind us all) that even the inclusion in the archive of a series of entities classed by Schneider under the rubric of ‘ethnic’ by way of recuperative practices of the ‘marginal’ continues to work, nevertheless, in the patrilineal logic which maintains that what there is in the archive is *what there is*⁸². Over the years of postmodernity, we have titled the document – like a holographic postcard – in and out of different ontological realms, giving it presence in absence and absence in presence⁸³.

Various webs of trust and mistrust, seduction and cynicism encircle, entrap, but perhaps to an extent even protect the document of performance, and hence its archive. Jones has suggested that memory itself is a screen, as muddling as the photograph⁸⁴; Auslander has divorced the performance from its possible audience, and in so doing, in a sense, also from its theatre-ness although not from its liveness⁸⁵. We have damned ourselves for not being there; we have let ourselves off the hook. We have undermined the importance of our own presence; we have undermined the importance of clues and traces; we have believed only the body and we have wondered where it all turns to fiction. We have wrestled with a lot of power. We have undoubtedly mixed memory and desire, and we have probably trusted others while lying to ourselves – in any case (‘in any case’, ‘and anyway’...), *on sortait* (tous!) *d’un théâtre*⁸⁶.

⁸² Schneider, Rebecca. ‘Performance Remains’ in Jones, Amelia and Heathfield, Adrian (ed). *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect, 2012.

⁸³ Again I refer to Amelia Jones’s “‘Presence” in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation’ in *Art Journal* 56. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century (Winter, 1997), pp. 11-18 and to its consequent discussion by Philip Auslander in the piece also cited above.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Auslander, Philip. ‘The Performativity of Performance Documentation.’ *PAJ* 84, MIT Press, September 2006.

⁸⁶ ‘*Tous!*’ because we were all leaving a theatre! Nerval, Gérard. *Sylvie* (1853).

There it is again: Nerval's imperfect, marking, I suppose, a disappearance in the past continuous. This thing that goes yet remains.

Pearson 'tests' his archeological approach on the Mickery archive in Amsterdam; and the Mickery archive is much like the Neo-Spectacular archive. It is made up of fragments, voices, bits of paper, bits of film, bits of photographs⁸⁷. The title of Pearson's book on the Mickery carries that word, 'imperfect' – it is, he tells us, an 'imperfect archeology'⁸⁸. Another word appears in Pearson's language, another word we have seen before and which, as I have written previously, troubles me: in-between. Pearson speaks of '*absence* and *uncertainty* – the space *between* materials, documents and narratives generates insight'⁸⁹. He continues: 'archaeology is about *interpretation*, about work being done in the gaps, about making an intelligent assessment of happenings that were never that certain or sure in the first place! Traces and relics are drawn together in a creative project in the present and not as a speculation on original meaning or intention, since that very meaning was already indistinct and multiple.'⁹⁰

If that is so, that is, if traces and relics are drawn together as a creative project in the present and not as a speculation on original meaning or intention, surely (Schneider echoes again) the 'point' of the archive, or of doing work in the archive, is to stretch that past continuous or imperfect over time, to talk about the past in the present – this is an operation which must have some sort of futurity at its heart, the possibility of future stretchings. In other

⁸⁷ Although, it must be said, the Mickery was a building and the Neo-Spectacularity was not: so unlike Pearson I do not have chairs or neon signs in this archive (unfortunately).

⁸⁸ Pearson, Mike. *Mickery Theater: An Imperfect Archaeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 27

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 27

words, if the operation of looking at the archive and drawing whatever kind of conclusion we may draw in the now is ‘a creative project in the present’, then the ‘gaps’, the ‘in-betweens’ that Pearson refers to can be housed in a different ontological category: are they ‘what is missing’ or are they ‘substance’ in themselves? If what we’re doing is, let me repeat once more, ‘a creative project in the present’ and not a work of ‘speculation’ then surely the ontological categories of what there is and what there isn’t, that is of the ‘traces and relics’ on the one hand and of ‘gaps and in-betweens’ on the other are categories which are at least similar, if not the same. The objects that *are* in the archive but which *did not take place* muddle this ontological set-up: what does the fact that there are documents in the archive of not only *disappeared* but of effectively *unappeared* performances tell us? Does it lend authenticity to the gap, to the relic, or to both? Does it finally oblige us to mistrust the patrilineal notion of archive? If the patrilineal notion of archive has urged us to ‘privilege the document over the event’⁹¹, what effect does the appearance, in the archive, of documents documenting unhappened events have: are these documents ‘lying to us’ or are they clandestine, rebellious entities offering a precious insight into what did not take place by smuggling themselves through with what did?

Ancient Greek poetry is full of crosses inserted by philologists indicating corrupt texts: these crosses indicate that the archive has swallowed bits of itself (anarchived itself?⁹²) for reasons ranging from humidity to palimpsesting to censorship. In thirty or forty years time, I imagine, we will have an archive of performance which we may well trust, but which in

⁹¹ Schneider, Rebecca. ‘Performance Remains’ in Jones, Amelia and Heathfield, Adrian (ed). *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect, 2012. p. 139

⁹² Ibid. via Derrida, Jacques. *Archive fever: A Freudian impression*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.

traditional (modern?) historiographical terms, will be lying through its teeth: who hasn't, in the past few years, seen documentation of events which didn't take place?⁹³ A mixture of circumstances – market forces and the pressure for online presence, lack of funding for the arts, and funders chasing box-ticking notions of 'excellence', 'emergence' or 'impact' – give rise now to a situation in which artists are often obliged to present as ontologically similar events which are not: events which happened with a live audience sit next to events which happened round a dinner table, events which were pure project are catalogued with events which were repeated night after night, in the market-driven late capitalist 'belief' (widespread yet never truly bought...) that if something is on the internet it has automatic ontological status (as if all documents' ontologies could find their equivalent match in the live).

The New Spectacular archive, and the episode of *Gas Station* most forcefully, strike me as posing some good questions, and this is probably also due to their temporal situation (which is also, perhaps not incidentally, the temporal situation of the *Mickery*) and to the financial situation they arose in: documentation was expensive and a bit of a hassle to organise, and this adds to what Pearson refers to as the 'palimpsestual' nature of *stuff* from the time⁹⁴. In a lot of cases, the performances of the Neo-Spectacularity weren't recorded in any

⁹³ Yves Klein's 1960 *Leap into the Void* comes to mind, but what I describe here is different: the fantastic impossibility of Klein's 'performance' is precisely what sets it apart from what so many artists do or are obliged to do today – the more 'realist' the better.

⁹⁴ I quote Pearson's passage here, for its energy seems precious to me and I would like to add his words to mine for the purposes of this investigation: 'the more I read and visit and listen, the more the story of *Mickery* becomes a *palimpsest*, a page written over, written around and written through but from which the central text (...) is already indistinct or erased. My account is ram-shackled, provisional, built from the information available to me at the time. My hope – given what on re-reading appears to be a long *apologia* – is that it will enhance wider appreciation of the historical, cultural and aesthetic significance of *Mickery*. And evoke a period of fervent creativity in theatre. And recover, reassess and activate some of the artistic gains made. And celebrate an energy and intelligence that might just inspire a new generation of practitioners.' Pearson, Mike. *Mickery Theater: an Imperfect Archeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014. p. 31

form because ‘nobody thought about it’; a lot of other cases of documentation are videoclips or films made with bits of documentation layered or dressed up with footage from elsewhere, shows of an hour squeezed into three glitzy minutes, LPs recorded and released, photographs messed with and made seductive – bits of marketing, bits of video-theatre, bits of artists’ photography bearing, probably, little relation to ‘what happened on stage’. There are videos of darkness, like *Corpo*; there are overdubs, voices off, scenes shot in exterior day. So it is a time, at least in Italy, suspended between not really caring about the document (a pre-industrial approach, if you will) and caring so much that the document becomes another work of marketable art (very post-industrial). Is there any reason to ‘trust’ these things more than *Gas Station*? If there isn’t, should we be considering them as objects which, by different means, architect their own future image, choose *themselves* how to dwell in the archive? If these are ‘choices’, should we respect those choices?

I am reminded of a performance by Rabih Mroué, an expert in the doctoring of images, in the art of setting up games of true and false, in the art of not losing sight of ontological categories as they shift (like dots on a radar). The piece, *Make Me Stop Smoking*, opens with a parade of titles and concepts of performances that Mroué didn’t make – by presenting them to an audience, he gives them *an* ontological status, dragging them out of non-being (clandestinity?) without, at the same time, affording them complete inhabitation (full citizenship?) of the real. Every artist has this archive; and what it contains is not only ‘bad ideas’ and spectacular mishaps⁹⁵, but sketches for ‘things’ that, for a number of reasons (like with the case of the Greek crosses), didn’t happen. These things are not ‘gaps’: they are

⁹⁵ ‘the time the set fell down’. Pearson, Mike. *Mickery Theater: an Imperfect Archeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014. p. 27.

documents, they are ‘objects’. If I hadn’t had the conversation with Syxty, I wouldn’t know about *Gas Station* as unhappening. Add forty, fifty years to this investigation (I wish Syxty a long life) and *Gas Station*, for all intents and purposes, would have been a performance that took place somewhere in Milan, sometime in the Summer of 1980.

•

Without giving into science fiction we do have to understand that everything that didn’t happen is also a part of history! Without completely giving in to the fantastical, the importance of possibility should be considered historically. Science fiction teaches us to problematise the past (...) to see history as a place of difference and not as a place of necessity.⁹⁶

While the unhappened may hold no value as a traditional historiographical category, that is in the sequential cataloguing of witnessed events, it holds quite a lot of value in terms of an affective (postmodern) historiography. Not because an affective historiography is a creative project in the present, but precisely because it *is* a work of speculation: if we are consigned to working in the gaps, may we not as well free ourselves from the ontological hierarchies which place the document first and the non-documented second? My sense is that these clandestine entities, these traces of nothing that smuggle themselves through (in the belly of plane, hanging underneath a lorry) have important work to do. As well as undermining a certain trust both for the document and for the event by occupying a place other than (not in between: other than) what there was and what there wasn’t, they also open a

⁹⁶ Perniola, Mario. *Autointervista sulla fantascienza*, given at Festival della Fantascienza SCIENCE + FICTION, Trieste, 21-30 September 2001, curated by La Cappella Underground.

door onto the undercurrents, the almoses, the nevers, the might-have-beens of an artist, of a movement, of a time, of a place. We could say that by unearthing them – in the logic by which the archive *is* a performance – they *do* exist, they become *happened*. But is it even necessary to do them this violence, to rip them out of their ontological positioning and squash them into our archival binaries (legal or illegal archival events)? What they are is speculative entities in themselves – they are *potential* players which were not invited to the table. But they could have been. And therein lies their political power: not in a ‘what if’ (for ‘what if’ has an answer in the preterite, and, in short, it’s ‘no’), but in a realist, hard, cold acceptance of a ‘not’ followed by a close look *anyway*. This strikes me as good for the past, and good for the present.

•

Everything that Italy has become – like everything that anything has become I suppose, with that harsh present perfect simple ruthlessly cutting time like a lizard’s tail – is a conglomerate of what happened and what did not. Not only because, in an almost fatalistic sense, what didn’t happen gave way to what did, but mostly because the very fact of giving way, of not happening, generates a certain kind of energy. Negative energy, perhaps: energy in the negative, subtraction rather than addition, taking away rather than adding to but, importantly, it is not the energy of failure. The notion of failure does not inhabit an ontological bracket in the almost or in the never, but the same ontological positioning of the happened: in fact, it *happens*; failure *does* happen, by failing. Unhappening is a

philosophically different beast, a thing in the minus, in the black hole – indeed, perhaps, ‘dark matter’. The purpose of looking at it is not to creatively respond to a lack of archive (or, indeed, to a surplus of it) but to acknowledge the fact that to look the status quo in the eyes is to look at a mixed bag of ontological phenomena, of which not only that which took place holds power. There is also another kind of power – negative power: power of a different order.

I want to return to the political agitation behind this idea of unhappening to stress that the act of looking to, back and for the unhappened in an historical context is different from asking ‘what if’, different from counterfactual accounts, different from virtual history because it in no way thrives on the kind of faux futurity implicit in those orderings: there is no intention, in making the unhappened worthy of historiography, to propose a (fantastical, fabricated) version of events other than that lodged in the archive. There is also no need for the past conditional (‘past contrary-to-fact’ as it is sometimes called): a tense which stands neither here nor there, and which has so little to do with the experiential, with the corporeal, with the live or the living (or even with the dead, for that matter) that its appearance, especially in the realm of the theatre, seems to me to carry very little weight. The unhappened is not a conditional tense, but an indicative one: ‘what if the Neo-Spectacularity had evolved’ is an inconsequential question – answering it teaches us nothing or very little. Of course it didn’t: there are clues everywhere, in the preterite, about how ‘a path was abandoned’, how it ‘returned to text’, about how the groups split up. At exactly the same time, of course it did: in a Roachian way, there are clues everywhere, in the imperfect, about how the New Spectacularity is still amongst us. I even saw it – indeed spectated it – on the hill in Monreale.

‘What if *Gas Station* had taken place?’ is equally uninteresting a question: it would have been a lovely performance, and so what?

•

While most counterfactual historical thinking lies in the pleasure of relocating the archival power of events (that is in supplanting one *arché* with another⁹⁷), the category of the unhappened thrives on the pleasure of constantly awakening a kind of awareness, a kind of attention towards the fact that dominating narratives are constellated, punctuated, surrounded by *weaker* lights, by *soft* entities, by things that give way but which nevertheless exist, and do so by way of subtraction. More micro than even micro-history, this is a pleasure of a political kind because it writes the invisible into the parable of the visible – it reminds us that, even if we can’t see it, there’s an underdog lurking somewhere in every story. It reminds us that there is always a lot that we’re not seeing – in a sense this is liberating and hopeful. Because if, as Richard J Evans has written, counterfactual stories (for they are much more story than history) grow out of a conservative ‘if only’ badly shrouded in a ‘what if’⁹⁸ or out of a done-wrong post-desiring nostalgia (disappointment?), the category of the unhappened event makes possible a filiation with the non-realized – and hence non-realizable, for history is a game of then or never – dreams buried within it. A look at potential futures with a cold awareness that

⁹⁷ This notion of ‘arché’ again is discussed by Derrida in *Archive fever*, and critiqued by Schneider in ‘Performance Remains’. Schneider makes the point that the very location of the archive in the house of the head of state makes not only for its inherent (‘macro-historical’, if you will) one-sidedness but also frames it as an entirely patrilineal affair. Schneider, Rebecca in Jones, A. and Heathfield, A. (eds). *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect, 2012.

⁹⁸ Evans, Richard J. *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*. London: Little, Brown 2014.

their potentiality is now lost is precious because that lost potentiality – though lost – holds an energy (the negative energy of not having happened) that is past continuous, and as such it can stretch into the present and invent something *else*. Looking at the unhappened *is* a form of ‘let’s keep dancing’: it is a form of making do with the nonetheless, of finding ways to thrive with the crumbs from under the table. It is also a means of ‘re-powering’ certain gloomy panoramas of the present, of trying to not get used to being short-changed. Weak, in essence, by being devoid of past or of past present, the unhappened event has nowhere to go other than the future, but not conditional: ‘future future’.

•

I wrote above that ‘the timing again is important’. This is because the unhappened (unlike the what if) *does* have some sort of dwelling in the calendar, and as ‘detectives’ we should look at calendars. Woven into this study, into its ‘isn’t anymore’, is the tension between what was becoming and what has become now, but also the tension between what had been becoming until then and was no longer (the tension of the wake, which the New Spectacularity *always already* inhabited). And there is yet another tension, between what was in the process of becoming in the early 1980s, that is ‘then’, and which was no longer in the process of becoming after that. If the path of the New Spectacularity was abandoned, if the groups stopped making work or began to make very different kinds of work, if they took a

long holiday from being honoured by the canon of Italian experimental performance⁹⁹, then the unhappened can reveal itself as metaphor for the whole operation of this theatre, which as early as 1978 was said to be ‘riding into the sunset’¹⁰⁰. Its future, or rather its ‘futurity’, matters for the present not only as a tool of ‘unrooted filiation’ (which, in its structural, unhinged, perhaps even utopian weakness, has a political cipher which shouldn’t be overlooked), but also in as much as it offers some (strange) positionings for imagining the world differently.

I speak of ‘positionings’ because the value of the kind of thinking occurring not only in the New Spectacularity but also in other forms of thought and art around the same time is almost wholly about placement, about location, about *position*. By this I mean that the value of many of the works and circulations of ideas we will see in the pages that follow regard an affective stance towards the world, something which I have often chosen to refer to as ‘infrastructural’: *infrastructures of feeling*, perhaps¹⁰¹. The stance of the large majority of the

⁹⁹ From the materials available, from the critical work of the past 20-odd years, it is fair to say that, in general, the New Spectacularity has not been seen as particularly worthy of study in the history of Italian experimental theatre. While the just before and the just after are remembered and studied in much more detail, the New Spectacularity was probably seen as a degeneration of the Post-Avantgarde – and in fact the two terms, Post-Avantgarde and New Spectacularity are often made to coincide. They are not, however, the same term nor the same ‘genre’, although many of the same groups are involved. The brevity and the ‘frivolity’ of the New Spectacular period has led to its neglect, but it might just be returning to the table.

¹⁰⁰ Bartolucci, Giuseppe. ‘The Post Avant-Garde: “An Autointerview”’ *TDR* 22.1 (1978), pp. 103-107

¹⁰¹ This concept of the stance / positioning as infrastructure is something which I have developed mostly from the work of the Roman New Spectacular company La Gaia Scienza, and I will return to this notion in writing about the company’s work. It is animated on two sides: on the one hand, we could speak of the *infrastructure* of feeling from Raymond Williams, stretching Williams’ work into something even more pulviscular, perhaps; I also use the word from de Certeau’s notion of apparatus as illuminated by Agamben in *What is an Apparatus?*, as something definable as a ‘network established between heterogeneous entities (...) always with a concrete strategic purpose (...) appearing at the intersection between power relations and relations of knowledge’ – this too I shall return to. I also want to say here that, although in using the word over the years it has developed the relations described above, I initially used it simply because it made me think of the organisation of metropolitan space: it made me think of motorways, of rail networks, of roads, of tramlines and in general of the act of urban planning and of constructing relations in the city.

works of the 1980s that form the object of my study is a *weak* stance – not (or not quite) in the philosophical sense attributed to the word ‘weak’ by postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo¹⁰²; rather, in the sense that it is a positioning which stages itself as acceptance in order to buy time – a very specific kind of time such as the meantime and the nonetheless – and uses it to elaborate ‘soft’ alternatives: replications of mechanisms, passive acceptations, joyful inhabitations.

The reason I choose to use the word ‘strange’ is because the effect I have just described *is* a strange stance: it is sideways, complicated, odd, even ‘off’¹⁰³. Later in this thesis we will see various declinations of what I am now describing as merely *strange*, most prominently though the aforementioned concept of ‘compassionate pessimism’ in Part II and through what I have come to term ‘the side of the surface’ in Part III. And we will see how, in effect, these strangenesses have a great deal of philosophical matter in common: they tend to appear in

¹⁰² Although Gianni Vattimo’s philosophy of the late 1970s and early 1980s occupied me greatly towards the beginning of this investigation, through an equally careful consideration of the works of Ferraris and (especially) Perniola, I have come to terms with a delineation of different ‘schools’ (different ‘differences’) in Italian postmodern thought and realised that Vattimo’s stance, though resonant with the object of my inquiry, is perhaps less suited, less attentive, less in tune with the work. I will elaborate on these difficulties and on my choice of stance towards them, as well as return to Vattimo’s work, in Part II.

¹⁰³ I nod here to Svetlana Boym’s use of the word ‘off’ in her delineation of the concept of ‘off-modern’; over the past few years, she has requalified it various times in various manifestos; I quote here some passages from ‘in praise of the off’: “‘Off’ is colloquial and particular--not abstract and equalizing the way “post” was. It is somewhat untranslatable. Let each language find its own version of being “off” and being modern at the same time. To a non-native English speaker, “off” sounds like child’s talk, somewhere between a game and language: if you didn’t know what “off” meant you could almost guess it. (...) Off is odd. “Off” suggests a dimension of time and human action that is unusual or potentially off-putting and embarrassing. It either describes something too spontaneous (off-the cuff, off-handed, off the record) or too edgy (off the wall), verging on the obscene (off color) or not in synch with the pace (off beat). “Off” is about life caught unawares. It is extemporaneous and humane. (...) And yet, being off is not to be out or anti. Being off is a balancing act and a form of virtuosity. You are never completely off the hook. You have to exercise a special attentiveness, the vigilance of sense, the virtuality of imagination and engagement in worldly practice (...)’. Boym’s attention to the ‘off’ is something I have often come into a kind of generative contact with over the course of my study here – interestingly, Boym refers to her project of theorisation of the ‘off-modern’ as interested in the ‘modern of the what if’.

two, anti-syllogistic movements (hardly ever ‘doing something in order to achieve something’ and almost always ‘doing something but / and doing something else at the same time’); and they often appear to so forcefully include a contradiction in terms that they seem to be ‘doing work against themselves’, paradoxical or self-destructive, containing arrow and anti-arrow within their own logic (let us think of various cusp-of-the-1980s phenomena such as Catho-Communism, or anti-work workerism). I am certainly not alone in noticing these ‘infrastructural’ movements at work in Italian thinking, especially at this time – ‘Italian anomaly’, ‘Italian difference’, ‘Italian enigma’ have been spoken about in philosophy for a long time as means of framing certain logical, aesthetic, political tendencies in Italian thought which produce ‘strange’ (and often surprising) results¹⁰⁴.

Over the course of this investigation, over the course of these panoramas, I will position myself time and again in a way that makes it possible to listen to these mechanisms, to hear how certain *strangenesses* make sense: I will make use of certain kinds of looking, certain kinds of hearing as methods because we will spend time with questions, in the theatre, such as how to reach the zero of representation or how to interfere with the televisual image by mimicking its movements; in architecture, we will find ourselves talking of ‘joyful acceptance of the everyday banal’; in literature we will align ourselves with ideas such as the

¹⁰⁴ In a recent intervention for *Alfabeta* discussing where the peculiarities of Italian thought, Italian radical thinking, Italian difference may be located (in view of these terms becoming once again very present in the *Zeitgeist*) Roberto Ceccarelli notes that what historically differentiates Italian philosophical practices from its other European counterparts is the inbuilt tendency to think conflict given by the fact that its political thought was never accompanied by the making of a nation-state: ‘the curiosity, the political interest, the analytical ingeniousness that the world recognises in Italian thought today (...) are due to a short-circuit which occurred during the era of globalisation, in particular in the first six years of the global crisis. The element of separation – between Italian thought and the State, and hence from its territory – is considered today as a resource for contemporary political thought.’ Ceccarelli, Roberto. ‘Echi della rivoluzione nel pensiero’ *Alfabeta*, 13th May 2014.

already encountered ‘discreet tragedy’¹⁰⁵. Politically we will speak time and again of images, images, images – and in and around these images we will hardly ever encounter ideas of refusal, of struggle, of revolt paired with their counterparts in sabotage, survival and resistance. Here time and again the energy of sabotage, survival and resistance will be paired with unlikely bedfellows: discretion, exhaustion, passivity, acceptance, weakness, softness, surrender.

Taking into consideration the unhappened event (also a ‘strange’ concept, also reliant on two subsequent movements and also, most importantly, a patent contradiction in terms – for how can an event unhappen?) is important in the economy of looking back to this time: it allows for a kind of stance which also muddles arrows and anti-arrows and as such allows us to take steps *to the side* rather than backwards or forwards. This is also why the method of an affective historiography, both in gathering and in writing, matters: in order to grasp certain ‘strange’ philosophical, aesthetic and political undercurrents a certain positioning is required – a positioning which has to do with affect because it has to do with stance, with gaze, with from where we decide to view a performance, a postcard, a city. In other words, it has to do with deciding *where we are standing*. Depending on where you look from, public resistance looks like personal survival; surrender can look like exhaustion; failures looks like nonethelesses. The fact of keeping dancing can look like ‘just plain dancing’, but the two aren’t necessarily the same. I propose that it is precisely a tilting of angles – holographic postcards – which can offer some sort of refoundational shadow of an energy utilisable in the now.

¹⁰⁵ Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Dinner Party (la Notte della Vittoria)*. Milano: Bompiani, 1994. p. 72

Hebdige – on the mode of feeling of the *then*¹⁰⁶ – writes this passage, which does a good job of describing the affective positioning I want to engage with here together with Peggy Lee’s views on dancing in 1969:

In a world where global self-destruction is possible we have to think again and think again and learn to think again. We are – all of us – strung out on the road to nowhere and let’s hope we can go running on the spot forever strung out between those two unthinkable moments: strung out between then and the Day After. And if that is the real postmodern condition, then we must learn to lighten up; we must learn how to dance in the dark. We must learn to recognize that we can move along together not necessarily in time, certainly not marching to the drum of history, moving along, perhaps even having fun, getting some joy and pleasure out of the whole exercise (...)¹⁰⁷

What makes different the affective stance described by Hebdige and the stance articulated here is that there is something in this ‘thinking again’ (perhaps it is the Italian thinking again, perhaps it a thinking again which clings to Marxist structures, or which is not ‘Dick Hebdige’¹⁰⁸) which experiences a different kind of pain in the attempt to gather ‘joy and pleasure out of the whole exercise’.

•

In the writing that follows I halt, three times, to include literary panoramas. These panoramas are not roads to nowhere; in fact, they are all views from hills: two views looking

¹⁰⁶ Of the then because Hebdige bases his ‘Post-Script 4’ in *Hiding in the Light* on an analysis of the Talking Heads’ 1985 single and video, *The Road to Nowhere*.

¹⁰⁷ Hebdige, Dick. *Hiding in the Light: on Images and Things*. London: Comedia, 1988. p. 141

¹⁰⁸ Again I refer to said diatribe between Hebdige, Latimer, Jameson.

down from a hilltop and one view looking up. They are not instances of running on the spot but attempts at understanding what certain kinds of light look like, in the dark and from a distance. Twice looking down and once looking up, these literary panoramas present the problem of light and of the stances or positionings from which light may be visible, and I have chosen them and translated them because in the work that they do and in the way they are written, they offer instruments which seem to me to be of use for thinking spectatorship and intermittence. I halt three times in the writing that follows to include literary panoramas from the letters, the novels and the travelogues of others because in the present gloomy panorama of the nonetheless, of the not anymore, and maybe even of the nevermind, I want to attempt to intercept that dim, half-lit sweet nothing of negative energy that whispers ‘and now what...?’

The movement in Italy can start again from a declaration of absolute weakness, abandonment, and retreat. Let’s withdraw our intelligence from the race of capitalist growth (...), let’s withdraw our creativity and our time from productive competition. Let’s inaugurate a period of passive sabotage and definitely evacuate the ridiculous space of Italian national identity.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Berardi, Franco ‘Bifo’. *After the Future*. Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011. p. 120

This Message was Recorded before your Departure:

Paraphrasis of *Crollo Nervoso* (1980)

Before the winter between 1979 and 1980, Magazzini Criminali were called Il Carrozzone. During that winter, they changed their company name, many of the members changed their own names, and effectively the group changed status¹¹⁰. No longer *really* satisfied with being a theatre company (although in truth they were to become more and more of a theatre company), they became – though perhaps I use a word plucked very much from the now – a ‘project’. The name Magazzini Criminali, in its early usages, is followed by ‘productions’, hinting to an intended polymorphism; at the same time, the company was effectively behaving, quite simply, like a band. The passage from Carrozzone to Magazzini Criminali Productions was marked not by a piece of theatre, but by a concert entitled *Last Concert Polaroid* (1979); the group started making videos and fanzines and especially, the group started making records¹¹¹. By blurring the lines between their own role in the world as one entity and another, they blurred the lines of documentation in the process – while the general ‘makeover’ of Magazzini might have sprung from a simple and understandable urge

¹¹⁰ As did other groups – though perhaps not quite as all-encompassing as Magazzini Criminali’s shift, other group name changes occurred, all in a similar vein: Nobili di Rosa, literally ‘rose nobles’ in reference to a coin in circulation in England during the reign of Edward IV became Falso Movimento, which apart from meaning ‘false movement’ is also the Italian translation of Wim Wenders’ 1975 film *Falsche Bewegung*, *The Wrong Move* in English. Krypton – a gas much like neon, or the fictional planet that is Superman’s birthplace – is the post-1979 name of Il Marchingegno, meaning ‘complicated mechanism’, ‘contraption’. A few years later, Società Raffaello Sanzio became Societas: latinisation. Antonio Syxty, finally, was not born ‘Syxty’ (as was to be expected and foreseen) Il Carrozzone means ‘the bandwagon’; Magazzini Criminali means ‘criminal warehouses’ or ‘criminal emporium’ or store, as put by Magazzini themselves: ‘Magazzini Criminali: Criminal Stores – Criminal Stories – Criminal Store – Star – Stories’ is the subtitle of fanzine Magazzini Criminali no. 2.

¹¹¹ The videos were films made to be projected at exhibitions or events. I have found traces of them in the programming of exhibitions, notably in events from the alternative gallery circuit in Bologna around 1980-1981. The fanzines are initially large format and printed on newspaper, containing writings and collages of drawings and pictures – they look very ‘homemade’. Later, a printed and bound journal called ‘Magazzini’ begins to be published by Ubu in Milan.

to elaborate on a creative high which was pushing them into other realms, in the historical it shifts the group 'out of scene' with the result of dispersing the memory of the group, of obfuscating its understanding as past project, of complicating its afterlife.

The records Magazzini Criminali produced circulate in the present as if the company truly had been a band. The theatre circulates less, as a name, as a memory, unless it is purposefully studied – which, happily, is happening more and more. The fanzines circulate amongst collectors because they are art objects in their own right, and the videos and the films do not seem to circulate at all. When, four or five years before beginning work on this thesis, I began to actively look for traces of Magazzini Criminali's *productions*, the only documents I could get my hands on were the audio recordings – which I did not treat as recordings, but as records. There are four: one is an LP entitled *Crollo Nervoso* ('Nervous Breakdown', 1980); one is an LP entitled *Notti Senza Fine* ('Nights without End', 1982); one is a compilation entitled *Architettura Sussurrante* ('Whispering Architecture'), curated by the architect Alessandro Mendini and released very limitedly on the Milanese label Ariston in 1983¹¹²; and one is another compilation entitled *Chantons Noël – Ghosts of Christmas Past* released on the Belgian label Les Disques du Crépuscule, to which Magazzini Criminali contribute the track *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990*¹¹³. This is a slow, layered bed of saxophones and drums, upon which, in Italian, a husky female voice repeats these lyrics:

¹¹² To this, Magazzini Criminali contributed a track entitled *Manifesto Degli Addio (Atlantide)* (Manifesto of Goodbyes – Atlantis). The LP is dated 1983, and is curated, and to an extent written, by Alessandro Mendini.

¹¹³ Just to make visible the scene I add that Les Disques du Crépuscule was Annik Honoré's label, which via her friendship with Joy Division's Ian Curtis, also became Factory Benelux.

*I can be like a gun – ah! I know I release heat – ah! I know I am atomic - ah!
They call me war – ah! War – ah! Don't be afraid – ah! Don't be afraid...*

Another female voice, with an Italian accent but speaking English, in a kind of American public broadcast tone:

*Today, the 25th December, the temperature in Honolulu is of thirty-one degrees.
There is no humidity.
The winds of South / South West are featuring a beautiful sunset.
Merry Christmas surfers of Waikiki.
Merry Christmas soldiers of Pearl Harbour, far away from home.
Merry Christmas hula ballerinas... je vous aime beaucoup.*¹¹⁴

I enter the space of Magazzini Criminali's discographic output via *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990* for various reasons: the first is that its images are reproduced at each turn of Magazzini's *ars poetica* up until 1984 and its form is one which the reader will learn to recognise in *Crollo Nervoso*, and as such it forms part of a 'canon' – I want the words of *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990* to pass the lips of my reader. The second is that I cannot treat this recording as anything but a track on a compilation: it is not the recording of a performance. Whether it is an off-cut of the record of *Crollo Nervoso* (plausible), whether it is a riff on more well-known Magazzini themes made in a studio for its own sake (also plausible), whether it is the trace of an unhappened event (equally plausible), it is a 5.59 track which does not have an object in the archive of performance to match it. Released alongside it are tracks from Tuxedomoon, Michael Nyman, Isabelle Antena, Cabaret Voltaire and other,

¹¹⁴ Lyrics from *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990*. Track B6 on *Chantons Noël - Ghosts of Christmas Past*. Brussels: Les Disques du Crépuscule / Factory Benelux, 1981.

less famous, contributors. It was an independent production, but not a limited run – in fact it was released again and again over the years. I can feasibly hypothesise that at least a few hundred people own this record, of which at least some must listen to it, and for a majority of these listeners Magazzini Criminali are a band and *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990* is just a track on a lovingly curated ‘Christmas’ compilation¹¹⁵. Hand-etched in the run-out grooves on both sides of the first pressing are the words:

A: *Croyez-Vous Aux Fantômes?* (Do you believe in ghosts?)

B: *Non, Mais J’en Ai Peur* (No, but I’m afraid of them)

I wrote above: I found audio-recordings, but I treated them as records. I have returned time and again to the question of the ontological status in the archive of these pieces: are they recordings of the performances, are they audio-versions of the performances, did the records come before the performances or did the performances come before the records? Finding answers to these questions has sometimes, for this material and in other cases, proven difficult; it would be easier to ignore these instances of archival and scenic destabilisation (for they are not the ‘proper’ objects of a scholar of performance) and move on. The script, the film and the record of *Crollo Nervoso* match: they are all the same text, and the audio-track of the film is the recording from the LP. The film is a montage of the performance cut and

¹¹⁵ Quite an interesting ‘Christmas compilation’, I would like to add – all the songs are Christmas themed from non-Christmassy artists. Very fascinatingly, talking about stances, the back of the record reads: ‘Yet another Christmas album. This one comes from Belgium, small country which has contracted debts from its partners all around the world. In debt we are towards the artists who have written the featured selections collected under the title Chantons Noël: let’s sing Christmas. Some will enjoy it, others will dislike it, some will be surprised. On this particular day where a smooth cloud seems to transform all virtualities into possibilities, our best wishes are for those who don’t live up to their abilities...’. Notes to *Chantons Noël - Ghosts of Christmas Past*. Brussels: Les Disques du Crépuscule / Factory Benelux, 1981.

interspersed with other footage borrowed, stolen or filmed on location ‘as film’: it is another ‘unreliable’ piece of archival material. *Crollo Nervoso* the performance pre-dates *Crollo Nervoso* the record (and, of course, the film); however the record *is* the ‘soundtrack’ of *Crollo Nervoso*, but in this case the ‘soundtrack’ also contains the ‘script’ – and in effect, in explaining these forms of dissemination and circulation to me, Marion D’Amburgo from Magazzini Criminali has referred to the piece as a ‘musical’¹¹⁶. We can be sure (as sure as we can be) that what we hear on the record is what the spectators of *Crollo Nervoso* heard in the auditorium: the record, then, is the sound-track of the image-track of the performance. As such, it is a *recording*. Or is it? When we hear a musical on record are we hearing the musical or are we hearing a recording of the musical? In what way are these documents defective – and are they defective at all?

We may not get the satisfaction of categories this time. We may just have to keep dancing. And, in a sense, dancing strikes me as my paramount archival duty here: while I have listened to *Crollo Nervoso* with my ears pricked up to catch whatever glimpse of archival ‘truth’ the record may offer, while I have inquired about it, read about it, studied it vis-à-vis script and film, while I have reasoned on it as a subject of intellectual inquiry, I have mostly listened to it because *I liked it*. And this *liking* it, in a sense, already contained all of the activities I describe above as pertaining to the scholarly. Before I was working on a thesis, before I had taken on a series of responsibilities towards the memory of the New Spectacularity and its theorisation, before I had questioned what an appropriate methodological stance may look like for the development of investigative work on the period,

¹¹⁶ Marion D’Amburgo in correspondence with myself, September 2011.

I had listened to *Crollo Nervoso* and *liked it*. The result is that I keep dancing: I know the record by heart because I play it often. I dance to it, I speak along with it, I know what comes next. I have a series of gestures which I find myself enacting at every listen – these are not the gestures from the film I saw years later but the gestures of she who has been listening to a record she likes and, as one does when one likes a record, she’s been moving to it. Alongside gestures, there are images: personal videoclips of sorts. The evocations offered by the record have – as records do, what I describe is nothing special – generated a series of other landscapes for the listener, landscapes which recur at each spin on the record player, and landscapes only partially chiselled into other shapes and forms upon contact with visual counterparts – similarly to how a novel as ‘seen’ by a reader is only partially altered by seeing the film or the play adapted from the novel later. Yet, there is one difference, and it’s in the dancing. While I am not referring here to embodied types of archival knowledge, I *am* referring to something to do with a sensuous relationship in the present with an object from the past, a relationship which records enact almost unproblematically.

Crollo Nervoso, then, poses a set of invitations that every record poses: listen to me, inhabit me, dance to me. An invitation easy to accept, and presumably accepted, by many in the past thirty-odd years of *Crollo Nervoso*’s circulation as an LP. My copies of these records do not come from archives, from theatres, from libraries but from record shops. My copy of *Crollo Nervoso* comes from a woman selling leftover stock from her father’s record store in Milan, and the others have similar, normal stories. Magazzini Criminali’s LPs do not travel differently from any other relatively rare second hand record sold mail-order. They do, however, pose a second set of invitations not to the listener, nor to the particularly ‘aware’

listener, but principally to themselves – and only by extension to the listener who may be aware of the theatrical genesis of the pieces. *Crollo Nervoso* invites *itself* to move from its ontological state as performance to its ontological state as record. It says to us: listen to me, inhabit me, dance to me. Because it says to itself: let's get out of the ephemeral. It says to itself: let's become immortal. It says to itself: let's stay *hot* – not the recording-of-something but a record, something which can be put on a turntable and *happen*, without constraints or contours of space nor time for its listener. It wants the heat of performance – but it also wants it to never end. It wants, it seems, 'notti senza fine': nights without end. And as a record, I think it can have them, at least until the vinyl wears out.

•

Before moving onto and into a reading of *Crollo Nervoso* which accepts this second set of invitations (having already accepted the first), that is, accepts to *listen* to the record, which is also to listen to the archive, and which is also to accept to dance without necessarily knowing a priori what the result of this dancing may be, I want to draw attention to some of the choices we make regarding how to treat these documents, choices which serve as backdrop to, let us call it, this RSVP. In the backdrop to the backdrop – background to the background – is the economy of archival forces and tensions, and especially of archival *attentions* described thus far, made up of particular forms of doing justice, paying attention, taking care; made up of atmospherical interceptions, of forms of attunement, of detectives and priests. The question is, without a hint of metaphor this time, *how can we listen to this?*

In his aforementioned article about performance documentation, Auslander halts on the status of the *phonograph* vis-à-vis the *photograph*, explaining (and challenging) the difference put in place by American philosopher Lee B. Brown between the ‘work of phonoart’ and the recording, which is to say the documentation of live musical performance¹¹⁷. While for Brown one is the documentation of a performance and one is not, and for Auslander both are documentation of performances belonging to different contexts (the studio, say, and the concert hall), the two agree on the fact that the ‘phenomenological boundaries between the documentary and the phonographical are blurry: it is not always clear “whether a given product is to be understood as a piece of phonoart or a transparent document of a performance”’¹¹⁸. Auslander has intervened in this arena on other occasions – writing, for example, a manifesto for the analysis of popular music through a complex structure of doubling up of personas¹¹⁹. In the context of these reflections, he makes the point that popular music is consumed primarily in the form of documentation. Hence in the realm of popular music – for popular music to ‘work’, to do its trick – we have to consider the record and the performance as ontologically coincident: ‘despite the physical absence of the performer at the time of listening, listeners do not perceive recorded music as disembodied (...) perhaps that is why people often feel compelled to respond to recorded music by moving or dancing, singing along, or playing air guitar: the bodily gestures encoded in the recorded sound seem to

¹¹⁷ Auslander, Philip. 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation'. *PAJ* 84 MIT Press, September 2006.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. But I add, in passing: ‘transparent’ meaning see-through or invisible?

¹¹⁹ Auslander, Philip. ‘Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto.’ *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 14(1), 2004, 1–13. Here Auslander discusses the persona of the pop star, the persona played by the pop star and the persona in the pop star’s song, weaving a web of doublings of personas experienced and lived out (as image, as gesture) by the pop star’s fans.

demand an embodied response'¹²⁰. This embodiment in the listener made available and even 'compelling' by the record is not, however 'confined to the auditory and haptic senses'¹²¹ but, and this is very interesting to me, 'it is also a visual experience'¹²². Auslander continues with a quote from Simon Frith:

to hear music is to see it performed, on stage, with all the trappings. I listen to records in the full knowledge that what I hear is something that never existed, that never could exist, as a 'performance', something happening in a single time and space; nevertheless, it is now happening, in a single time and space: it is thus a performance and I hear it as one, [and] imagine the performers performing...¹²³

This ability to 'see' the performance by hearing it, Auslander adds, hinges necessarily on a series of visual and cultural constructs: what we see is informed by what we might have already seen, possibly by the past experience of the live, or by a mediated experience of video-clips in which we may have seen the performers performing. Yes, but *is that all there is?* It seems to me – perhaps because I am of another generation, perhaps because Auslander and I have different tastes in popular music¹²⁴ – that the most interesting aspects of the video-

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 4

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 4

¹²² Ibid. p. 5

¹²³ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 211, quoted in *ibid.* p. 5

¹²⁴ By which I mean two things: firstly, that there is a generational aspect to this – I was born at the dawn of music television and do not imagine the concept of the videoclip as a recording of the performers performing, rather as an entirely other narrative, much more like a microfilm or the listener's 'own personal movies', often without the presence of any musicians at all. Secondly, the question is also genre-bound: while a rock band may want to show itself performing in the videoclips because the liveness is part of the myth, while a popstar needs to put him or herself inside the video because their body and presence is essential to its circulation, in a lot of other music – for example in most electronic music – the artist doesn't tend to feature in the video at all, thus rendering the music always 'depersonalised' and always more connected to its 'film'.

clip are given by the fact that it is not the documentation of a live performance¹²⁵; equally, the beauty of listening to records for me is that when I listen, I do not ‘see it performed, with all its trappings’, and I do not ‘imagine the performers performing’. While I too feel compelled to dance and sing along, and while I too feel that there are gestures encoded in the recorded sound which demand an embodied response, those gestures needn’t come from the ‘bodily’: I may be dancing to colours, to landscapes, to light – why should I have to incorporate the *trappings* of the live into such an experience? Why, indeed, should I even dwell on the trappings of my *own* body?

On phonographs and photographs, I want to bring in the voice of Fred Moten who, in a passage of his *In the Break*, regards the phonograph as the ‘sound of the photograph’¹²⁶ and proposes an attention to what he terms the ‘phonic substance’ of the *visual* document. Apart from contributing to the critical constellation upon which an affective historiography gazes, Moten’s considerations here strike me as useful because I want to suggest that we also agitate the question from the other side, from sound into image.

¹²⁵ In a passage of *Enigmas*, Perniola draws attention to a moment – the moment of punk and especially post-punk, so the moment which chronologically interests us here – as ‘diffusing a new apathy that contrasted radically with the subjectivism and visual perceptionism of the sixties and seventies (...) the combination of video and youth culture in music video marked a decisive step in this direction: the devitalization of the human figure in music video occurred through the separation between voice and body. From this standpoint, the most interesting video-clips are those in which the singer hardly ever appears, and the voiceless human figures give the impression of estrangement. The effect of music video is radically different from that of silent movies: the music video plunges the human figure into the silence in which things have always been abandoned; whereas the lack of speech in silent movies only heightens the eloquence and expression of the human figure (...)’. Two things are important to me in Perniola’s observations here: firstly, this shift’s historical boundedness, an effect staged by Perniola as the feature of a particular time (late 1970s-early 1980s); secondly, this question makes me ask a question which I feel many companies of the New Spectacularity might have asked themselves: and how do we do this at the theatre? Once you cut the default impulses towards projection or immersion, the answers, I think, make for interesting theatre. Perniola, Mario. *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*. Trans. C. Woodall. London: Verso, 1995. p. 48

¹²⁶ Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. p. 210

Moving after the Barthesian notion of the *punctum* of a photograph, and moved by the idea, also exposed by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, that a photograph has something to do with death – ‘death in the future tense’ as Barthes himself puts it – Moten searches for (and *finds*) the *sound* of the photograph, which serves as a sort of *punctum* in motion, a dynamic *punctum*, that is a *punctum* in its productive, generative potentiality. A punctum that *keeps* doing. Moten calls for a ‘looking that is attentive to the sound – and movement, feel, taste, smell (as well as sight) – the sensual ensemble – of what is looked at’¹²⁷: the act of listening to a photograph may reveal what moves and acts beyond the confines of the photograph both as past event and as photograph-in-itself; a moving and acting which is aesthetic and which is political and which stretches not only out of the photograph into the body, but also out of the spatio-temporal limitations of the photograph and into other spatio-temporal expanses¹²⁸. By affording the photograph a ‘phonic substance’, Moten takes an important step towards the aesthetic opening up of the archive and thus does something useful in terms of sketching out what affective relationships we may be able to forge with the (photo)graphed past; as such, he takes steps towards defining what an affective historiography may look like. Moten affords the past (always incomplete) document an opening for its sensual completion: instead of treating memory as screen, or as mediating obstacle, Moten comes into that argument from

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 208

¹²⁸ Let me be clear: Moten is writing about the photograph of the mutilated body of Emmett Till, a photograph which, to borrow Moten’s own words, ‘moves and works’ beyond any kind of moving and working which these photographs, here, may hold the potential to do; and it is a photograph, that of Emmett Till, which moves and works in a way which is completely *other* to what the documentation of the New Spectacularity does – a comparison isn’t thinkable and is in no way what I am suggesting or attempting. Rather, it is the forceful reality of the metaphor, or the metaphor-becoming-real as employed and exposed by Moten which interests me here: Moten seems to me to operate a sort of *carnification* of a metaphor, a metaphor pushed to the point of opening up a somatic core to the printed, visual, finite surface of documentation, pushed to the point of becoming *real*.

the other side, one which seems to be equally worth exploring. Moten proposes an investment of the document by way of the fleshy and of the phonic, which I would like to intend – as my use of the term ‘affective’ so far illustrates – as a question of attention. What happens if we switch Moten’s terms into negative: can we reformulate Moten’s call for a kind of ‘looking attentive to the sound’¹²⁹ of what is looked at as a kind of listening attentive to the image of what is heard?

•

I could attempt some sort of reconstruction; I could match the various documents in order to attempt some sort of veracity in *describing* the events that happened on stage, veracity through correspondences. I could then match the above with the many reviews and memories written about the performance, attempting to grasp the affective substance of the spectatorship of others. This is work I have done. But as this piece, in particular, has wished to keep itself ‘hot’, its spectatorship is continuous – imperfect, evidently, and continuous, again, for the nature of imperfects is continuous. In accepting the invitation posed to me and extended to me by Magazzini then, I want to respect three aspects of the operation that is *Crollo Nervoso*: firstly, its quest for immortality – its wish to stay hot and its form as object that keeps revolving; secondly, its *evasive* nature: evasion from the space of the theatre (both in the physical and in the cultural sense) and its evasion from the temporal limits of performance, from its ephemerality, that is its without-endness; thirdly, in a movement

¹²⁹ Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. p. 208

dependent on the first and second, I want to respect the space it offers for experimentation (which, like all experimentation, could yield not what we wish for). To attempt some kind of analysis of *Crollo Nervoso* as an LP could, by positioning us differently, shed a different light on the objects contained therein.

I propose to phrase such an analysis as a *paraphrasis* of *Crollo Nervoso*, as one would execute a paraphrasis of a piece of music, indeed a musical or an opera, with recording and libretto to hand. My intent is not to explain nor interpret, but very literally to speak, to write, *beside* the work. A practice of *writing beside* which garners its authority not in striving for exactness but in concentrating on the attention it can give by having spent time thinking *alongside* the work, on the side of the work and at the edge of the work – where the white of the vinyl is still milky and opalescent unlike the centre, which has yellowed with age. A practice of *writing beside* which (background of the background, pulviscule of the pulviscule) could, like dust, ‘interrupt and blur’ what there is, palimpsestually. A practice of *writing beside* in an attempt to respect all the aforementioned invitations and try to avoid forcing the circular shape of the record, continuously revolving, into a square – indeed, into the rectangle of an A4 sheet of paper.

•

‘This message was recorded before your departure’: I choose to single out this line in particular from the gush of words that is *Crollo Nervoso*. It is a sentence which speaks of the document, which speaks – as we shall see – to the narrative (w)hole of the performance, and

which does a particular kind of work by *preempting*. A message recorded before departure muddles temporal lines, and muddled temporal lines make up the nervous system of this, let us simply call it, composition: in *Crollo Nervoso* we encounter the future treated as past and the past predicting the future; we encounter imminent catastrophe and we attend cocktail parties. It is a script, and a record, which matches science-fictional time-travelling with the most romantic *mal d'Afrique* – it puts on the table various elements we will return to in our encounters with the Italian New Spectacularity. ‘This message was recorded before your departure’ is a sentence spoken, in the script, in Vietnam in 1969; spoken into a microphone in Italy in 1980; listened to who knows who, when and where ever since; written into a thesis in London in 2014. It truly *was recorded* before our departure, and has been revolving ever since – we depart, we depart, we never arrive. Maybe it’s the nature of revolving and maybe it’s the nature of this ‘revolution’, upon which we can each make our own conclusions.

•

Crollo Nervoso is divided into the following four tracks occupying the two sides of the record. The sides are ‘acts’: side A and side B are act I and act II. The two tracks on each side, in turn, are the two scenes contained within each act¹³⁰:

A1. *Mogadishu 1985*

A2. *Los Angeles International Airport Three Years Later*

¹³⁰ A copy of the LP *Crollo Nervoso* is included on CD in the appendix at the back of this thesis, should the reader wish to paraphrase alongside me or listen at a later stage. The recording is just under one hour in duration, half an hour per act / side.

B1. *Saigon 21 July 1969*

B2. *Africa August 2001*

•

Mogadishu, 1985

We begin in a future which now is past. It was the future then – and it was Mogadishu, Somalia, 1985. A plane lands, maybe in a sandy, arid environment. It *sounds* sandy and arid, windy and hot. The record already *sounds* yellow, the soundscape already hot and full. A male offstage voice announces space and time: *Mogadishu, 1985. Mogadishu, 1985.* More plane sounds. There's a spectre here already, the spectre of war, in a generic 'war film' guise, aircrafts and a sort of panic – and Mogadishu was at war in 1980, but 1985 is five years away. Immediately the record poses the listener the question of the future: why are we in the future? And why are we in the future to sound like the present? A bird of bad omen flies overhead. Two female voice are yelling at each other, as if from a great distance.

Sea or see?

Si!

No.. sea or see?

Si!

No, listen to me! Sea or see?

Si!

No, listen to what I'm saying! Sea or see?

Si!

No, sea or see?
Sì!
Aaaaaaaahhhhhh!
Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

The feeling is: Mogadishu has fallen into nonsense, into this situation of non-sense. The fact that there is no audible difference between *see*, *sea*, and *sì* (words I lift here from the text, or I wouldn't know what they are) means that it can never be deciphered. It is an intro in medias res – and res that started when? When did this dialogue begin? And will it ever end? It can't: the two characters can never understand each other. It is nonsense, but there's something painful about this non-sense given entirely by that placement, *Mogadishu 1985*. Because if the flash which immediately haunts is the flash of that generic spectre of war, this nonsense places itself in a place of war: the colour the narrative assumes is 'automatically' apocalyptic. A syncopated track plays in the background. The female voices return:

Guns in Ghana!
Gomme in Ghana!
No, I said guns!
Gomme!
Guns!
Gomme!
No, listen to me: guns in Ghana!
Gomme in Ghana!
Ok, as you prefer. Ghana or Cameroon?
Ghana!
Guns in Ghana then!
Gomme in Ghana!
Aaaaaaaahhhhhh!
Grrrrrrrrrr!

There is something about the first voice, the same voice which was posing the questions in the first dialogue, the same voice which keeps repeating ‘no, listen to me’, ‘no, listen to what I’m saying’, which appears even more clearly in the sentence ‘ok, as you prefer. Ghana or Cameroon?’. There’s something game-showy about this voice that always has the ‘right’ answer, the voice that corrects without sense. It is a lubricated, young, enthusiastic voice. Above all, it’s frivolous. It’s shouting out names of countries as if they were names of wines. Guns, gomme. What’s gomme? The conversation is in English, and has this *gomme* in it. Gomme: gum, rubber. Guns or Gomme? Ghana or Cameroon? The first ten minutes of *Crollo Nervoso* assault. Mapping out the coordinates is always impossible. We can’t understand the words, we can’t understand why, we can’t understand what is being said, where we are, why we’re in Mogadishu saying these things. In a sense, the listener / spectator is locked out: I’m locked out of *Crollo Nervoso*, locked out of its sense. All I know is the voices, that elastic youthful shrill voice, and the other one exhausted, coarse, round and rough. The rest is a series of entities which sparkle on and off, with no rhyme nor reason. Ghana, guns, sea. Africa, war, nonsense. This is the landscape of *Crollo Nervoso*, this is where we are.

More planes land and take off.

The end of the scene carries a significant shift in tone, given mostly by the music. All the music in *Crollo Nervoso* is plundered: used without permission, the stolen work of others. I have seen the record referred to as the first Italian work of ‘plunderphonics’: a bootleg version in circulation at the time of Brian Eno and David Byrne’s *My Life in the Bush of*

Ghosts is ripped up and reassembled, repeated and fragmented, chopped up and looped, and constellated with riffs and voices from elsewhere – the Beatles, Billy Holliday, Brion Gysin. I recognise the slow dark intro of Byrne and Eno's *Mea Culpa*: a change in gels, from warm to cold. Which is also a change of gels from day to night: a theatrical use of music. More planes land and take off in the background. The elastic voice, whose name is 'Dallas', asks the tired voice, whose name is 'Irene', if she would like a cocktail.

Would you like a cocktail, baby?

Irene says no: *I don't like cocktails*. The script informs us that 'the word EMERGENZA appears, flashing on all the computer's video terminals'. Irene repeats that she doesn't like cocktails. What does she want then? She wants *a room with a view*. Mmmmmm, Dallas coquettishly responds.

There's desire here. There's desire and luxury and frivolity mocked. And then there's Africa, wars, and guns. This future has something to do with the past: a room with a view on both sides, the bloody spectre of Italian colonialism (Mogadishu is in ex-Italian Somaliland) in the future is a backdrop to an empty conversation in the present, where guns and cocktails are placed on identical signifying planes. If no 'sense' can be extrapolated from the first scene of *Crollo Nervoso*, the situation immediately does something which pertains to the sphere of the tragic, something pertaining to the sphere of a lack of control – a lack of control like a lack of control 'orchestrated by the gods for the mathematical annihilation of a human

being'¹³¹ which will haunt Irene (who will become the tragic heroine of *Crollo Nervoso*) and which already haunts us who read and listen: already in the folds of the nonsensical / empty / frivolous appears something closer to register of the obsessional. The dialogue is made of words thrown and thrown back again. A game of ping-pong in which objects fly in and out of the 'room with a view', the 'room' of the theatre, never able to organise some sort of discursive terrain around themselves. Nothing, yet, connotes *Crollo Nervoso* as a work of dystopian science-fiction, apart from its being in an undefined, bellicose African future: nothing is being said. The 'nothing' that is being said has strange tones and strange 'intensities', though; oddly placed enthusiasm and discontent. Although unable to single out what or why, we know, somehow, that it's the end of the world: things are getting churned out, out of their rational order. And it feels like there's nobody here. Where is everybody?

Another plane takes off.

•

Los Angeles International Airport Tre Anni Dopo /

Los Angeles International Airport Three Years Later.

Buongiorno. International time-table.

Ore 6: Denver Dallas

Ore 7: San José Costarica Chicago

¹³¹ I'm thinking back to Jean Cocteau's introduction to *La Machine Infernale*.

Ore 8: Bogotà Guantanamo La Habana New York City Montreal

The list above continues until 5 am: Los Angeles International Airport. It halts once to declare, not without melancholy, that *Hong Kong a beaucoup changé*. The timetable, ‘the messages of “Darling” the calculator appear on all computer terminals’. Darling is the voice off: Darling is his name, and Darling is a computer. And he affirms that Hong Kong has changed, interrupting the robotic tone with the breath of nostalgia of a tired ambassador. A host of voices lifts us out of the monotonous, gently pulsating soundscape, out of this calm in the form of a list. It’s a series of cacophonous and noisy ‘hellos’. It’s our two women, we recognise their voices.

Irene: *Hello! Dallas! Hello! Hello! Hello Dallas! Hello! Hello!*

Dallas: *Hello!*

Irene: *Dallas! Hello Dallas!*

Dallas: *O.K, d'accordo.* (OK, agreed)

Irene: *Hello!*

Dallas: *Sì d'accordo.* (Yes, alright)

Irene: *Dallas!*

Dallas: *Sì, meglio domani* (Yes, tomorrow would be better).

But something begins to appear here, something like a delineation of roles or at least of behaviours. Four voices are in the room now, initially impossible to distinguish but as the record turns, as we listen in, we can tell how the wires are crossing: Irene is trying to get hold of Dallas, but Dallas is not listening to Irene; Dallas is trying to get in contact with a new character, Willard, who is also trying to get in contact with Dallas, but the line appears broken. Everyone here is on phones, or on walkie-talkies, or on some kind of device, cables,

wires, signals: transmissions appear broken. Interruptions and panic. There is one uninvited guest, Irene, who nobody wants to listen to. But there is also the ghost in the machine, Darling, who continues to speak slowly at the centre of these wires, who continues to recite the time-table, then continues to countdown, then dispenses practical information: *logical diurnal circuits inserted. Gravitational simulation activated. Vital functions of the crew: regular.* A spaceship is taking off, at Los Angeles International Airport, ‘three years later’ (1988? I wouldn’t be so sure). Three people are on it, and a computer. Irene can hear the computer – she talks to him in between attempts to communicate with Dallas: sentences such as *Dallas can you hear me?* are followed by sentences such as *Darling, how much time do I have left? Darling, how many chances do I have?*

Darling look at my hands: I’m so fragile.

Irene is trying to save herself from something, but from what? More talk about cocktails ensues. Dallas offers *nice sweet juicy papaya syrup, bobby pins* and goes around saluting phantasmagoric *chicos: hola chicos! Bienvenidos chicos!* Irene’s state of agitation grows, led by Darling whose information gets more and more troubling: *you have no future. Destination: indifferent. Time: indifferent. You mustn’t let emotion transpire. Not even at Christmas. Relax.* For Irene, all of this is impossible: she cries out that her hair is a mess, that she can’t focus on the situation, that *siento mucho calor*, that she has a *radio connected to the police*, that *videocameras videocameras videocameras are spying on me spying on me spying on me spying on me.*

Not even at Christmas Christmas Christmas Christmas Christmas

It becomes clear, in *Los Angeles International Airport*, that it is Irene who is at the nexus of events which determine the *crollo nervoso*, the ‘nervous breakdown’. It becomes clear that she is the point towards which all these arrows vanish: she is constantly surrounded by the ‘noise’ of the scene, the noise of modernity, the noise which never affords her gravity, stillness nor silence. Her only relationship is with a computer, Darling, who coldly hands her ominous information which seems to set her on fire. Darling begins to let Irene know, in his usual stark tone, that everything is going for the best. Irene just repeats the sentence, each word again and again:

Irene Irene Irene Irene I can assure you assure you assure you with absolute certainty certainty certainty that everything is going for the best the best the best the best

And it would be easier, at this point, to let the dramaturgy of *Crollo* solely rest here, at this criss-cross between Darling and Irene, at their point of intersection, at her neurosis sparked by his cold foresight. Darling as *deus ex machina* or indeed as *machina-deus* who creates problems and resolves them, who has the keys to the script and to the world; Irene as ‘tragic hero on a walk in the Callejòn del Gato’, as Ramòn del Valle-Inclàn used to say about his characters: tragic hero on a walk where they sell cheap mirrors, where her heroism deforms and stretches reflected in concavities and convexities. It would be more narratively satisfying to stay with these two characters, to keep them in mind and follow them until the obvious ending, until Irene goes mad: victory of the computer over the world. But in *Crollo*

Nervoso this doesn't happen. And what I have called the 'noise' occupies too much space – too many words, too much time, but also too much affective substance – to be ignored. Cocktails, papaya juice, surfing take up too much of our attention to just let these figures go. Dallas and Willard, they're audible, they're likeable, they too resonate somehow. And it resonates that more than half of the script of *Crollo Nervoso* is in English and Spanish. I cannot let go of these things: I cannot class them as bits of postmodern debris. Cocktails, papaya juice, surfing are the recurring figures of *Crollo Nervoso*. Either we ignore them or we dance. Which is to say either we ignore them or we *listen* to what they mean, what these intensities describe.

In the preface to the script, Lorenzo Mango wrote this:

The tragic in *Crollo Nervoso* is in all that which remains unspoken in the room, it's a secret reverberation, a tension which betrays appearances. The banal and the reckless are the protagonists of this landscape, but the banal and the reckless are the environment able to sustain an interior epic, which flows alongside the work and never shows its face.¹³²

The banal and the reckless, as Mango beautifully describes the substance of the piece, do more than supply an environment: the epic is within these things already¹³³. And while *Crollo Nervoso* may appear as almost parody of itself, parody of postmodern fears, neuroses,

¹³² Mango, Lorenzo. Preface to *Crollo Nervoso*. Brescia: L'Obliquo, 1986. p. 6

¹³³ I also wonder if the tragic that remains unspoken in the room of the theatre ('the room with a view' on the past and the future) is similar somehow to a 'tragic' described by Joe Kelleher regarding Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *A.#2* episode of the *Tragedia Endogonia*: 'a theatrical tracing, through whatever remnants can still be touched upon, of everything theatre has long ago forgotten of itself'. Kelleher, Joe in Castellucci, C. and R., Guidi, C., Kelleher J. and Ridout, N. *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge, 2007. p. 57

agitations and indeed breakdowns, all absorbed in a fast and furious atomic nonsense (Dick Hebdige rings in my ears, ‘all strung out on the road to nowhere’), the fact that the banal and the reckless dominate the scene means that we have to learn to deal with the banal and the reckless: listen to them for what they’re trying to say. The world of ‘leisure’ appears terrifying; the language bends and swirls like a summer pop song; but the *way* these figures are staged (bouncing, repeating, looping, returning) draws out a pattern and tells us a story. The story of the future, the story of the past, or rather the story of unescapable time: all the ghosts here are not the ghosts of the 1980s, but ghosts of past disasters whose effects are stretched over time like a skin on a drum, still resonant, still alive, still reacting. All we have here is a sort of last beach of the modern, where tensions and fears have scrambled like a pay-per-view channel. The figures visible only between the slats are, nevertheless, handpicked: lyrics lifted from lyrics to become other lyrics, like Dallas’ repeated refrain, *wind in my heart, dust in my hair*, where the pop song in reference is the Talking Heads’ *Listening Wind*, a song about post-colonial terrorism; like Darling’s biography, spoken calmly through emergency signals at the end of this scene:

Buongiorno. I am the third generation electronic elaborator BX-9000. My name is Darling (American accent). I started to function on 15th August 1983 in Los Alamos, Texas. My constructors gave me an audiovisual circuit. (Starts singing) when I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, what will I be...

It is as if the scripting of the piece were constructed to not let us get away from how the world in *Crollo Nervoso* is yes a future world, yes an imaginary world, but always forcefully a world *inherited*. We get caught up in the narration, we are swept up by present tensions, and a

ghost comes and darts through the space. A space that is crowded with familiar things which continue to haunt. It is a banal and reckless dance in the present, staged in the future, with a past (a colonial past, a technological past, an industrial past) which remains. As if to say: the disasters of the past *will* remain. So... *would you like a cocktail, baby?*

A venetian blind comes down between the stage and the audience. Slow blackout.

•

Saigon 21 Luglio 1969 /

Saigon 21st July 1969

Sex, luxury and war. Darling introduces 'Saigon' with an American accent, opening the 'o' into an 'a', adding too much emphasis on the 's'. *Sssaigan*, he keeps repeating. It sounds like a blade flying into the sonic space of the record. Synthesisers glisten in the background. We're in Saigon, on 21st July 1969, on the day of the moon landings. As in the Ghana / Cameroon scene, there's a particular taste for this notion of 'invasions'. Colonialism of the moon? War on the moon? I think: Vietnam and the Moon are the same thing. We're in a pool-side / in-flight state of entertainment, and our characters are called 'Beuys' and 'Playmate'. More signifying names. Their voices are heavily echoed this time, vocoded, alien. The various calls of emergency and attack are now naturally woven into the narration:

Playmate: *add a little more tequila boy.*

Beuys: *lime?*

Playmate: *lime, boy.*

Beuys: *emergency, emergency. Do you surf?*

Playmate: *I adore surfing, boy.*

Beuys: *there are some wonderful beaches in the South.*

Playmate: *I know the place. It's a surfer's paradise. I adore surfers.*

Beuys: *You're just a little bitch honey.*

Beuys has an Italo-American accent. The Playmate sounds like dubbed American TV shows used to sound in Italian. They continue like this, flirting wildly and launching emergency calls and distress signals: everything is rolled into one, as if everything were 'the same thing'.

Beuys: *What do you think about another fuck? A quick, nice, long, fuck.*

Playmate: *OK, we can go! Now, mmm. So let's go! Let's go for a cruise this night!*

Beuys: *Problems with the central generator. Problems with the central generator.*

Playmate: *Willard, son of a dog, can't you deal with this?*

They speak in unison sometimes: *nothing is true everything is possible. Everything's OK.* On things like this, it seems, we all agree. Joseph Beuys and the Playmate are organising a fuck, a surfing trip and an attack at the same time, in the same language, with the same tone. While they dispense instructions to 'all the members of the crew' to 'only make use of corridor B', or 'only make use of weapons with blades', to 'remain in radio contact', to 'follow the red lights', and finally to 'activate dispositions for attack operation', they return to cocktails and to beaches, to Bloody Marys and to types of surfboards. Beuys repeats the word

‘attack’ for two minutes or so, we can feel them crashing into something – a meteor, a rock, a city, a plane, a spaceship, an aircraft, a planet, the moon.

A sense arises that in this scene – this scene in the past, the only scene in the past – the future of the rest of the piece was decided. That this is the shape of things to come. The end of civilisation, maybe. The beginning of late capitalism, maybe. The beginning and the end of the art world? Everything is post- here, everything feels like from now on we’re dancing on graves. Beuys’ tinny voice echoes again and again, *questo messaggio è stato registrato prima della vostra partenza*, this message was recorded before your departure. Turns out it had all been decided before you even took off.

Brion Gysin’s *Pistol Poem* fades in, in its 1960 BBC recording: one... two... three... the piercing sound of bullets rings out of time with the counting. More counting, different counting this time. It sounds like a gun and it also sounds like a rocket taking off. Eno’s piano enters again, dark, cosmic, ominous. The sound of gunshots introduces another kind of phonic substance, one which pierces through the body of the listener – the rhythm and the texture of the sound oblige another kind of bodily reaction, a tilting back of the head perhaps, a jitter, a spasm that starts in the stomach. Rosella Bonfiglioli referred to *Crollo Nervoso* as a piece made up of ‘data recorded on the level of the skin’¹³⁴, its ‘tragic’ meaning travelling in guises affecting mostly the sensorial: the music, the lights – the ghosts are *there*, with their cargo of dreams of Western domination. In *Ebdòmero*, a piece from 1979 which already presents many of the figures appearing in *Crollo Nervoso*, a long first scene is spent ‘preparing’ the skin: talk about moisturisers, about oil, about the utopian achievement of ‘a perfect skin’. *Ebdòmero* is a

¹³⁴ Bonfiglioli, Rosella. *Frequenze Barbare: Teatro Ambiente / Cinema / Mass Media / Metropoli / Musica / Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini Criminali Prod.* Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981. p. 62

performance that comes from de Chirico: more modernist ghosts. De Chirico, whose ghost is already in Mendini: in these spaces stretched out with impossible vanishing points, in which Greek heads float mid-air, where the abandoned countryside outside the city meets the flashy graphics of early virtual reality, already during the first World War.

I think of Charles Jencks' concept of *supersensualism*: an exaggerated attention to forms and colours not at the service of usage nor as ocular pleasures, but as vehicles for bodily experience, annihilations of 'the gap between spoken and whispered words'¹³⁵. 'Evocation no longer simply experienced but suffered.'¹³⁶

•

Africa Agosto 2001 /

Africa August 2001

A group of Eritrean women appear, dressed in white, veiled, talking about the moon and reciting a funerary elegy for Roland Barthes. On the monitors the spaceships from '2001 a space odyssey' dance around, airy.

All the past is the future and all the future is the past in *Crollo Nervoso*. Both are the end – both are where something stops. A set of Chinese boxes of mournings: from Mogadishu into L.A., from the attack on the moon to the attack on Vietnam, from the Vietnam / Moon to Africa in the year of the Space Odyssey, a funerary elegy for Roland Barthes, which in a sense

¹³⁵ Jencks, Charles. *Modern Movements in Architecture*. London: Penguin, 1985.

¹³⁶ Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. p. 38

is already a funerary elegy for the sense of postmodernity, a conscious *adieu, mon amour* to connotation, to evocation, to the possibility of an intermittent clarity in the world of the second degree.

The women's voices are layered and overdubbed, each voice talking with itself, three, four, five times. As the piano fades, another voice enters, the voice of Billie Holiday:

*Yesterdays /
Days I knew as happy sweet /
Sequestered days /
Olden days /
Golden days /
Days of mad romance and love /
For then gay youth was mine /
Truth was mine /
Joyous free in flame and life /
Then sooth was mine /
Sad am I /
Glad am I /
For today I'm dreamin' of / Yesterdays*

An other arrow shoots back, shoots forward, today but dreaming of yesterdays, in the grainy voice, the black voice of Billie Holiday ('motherfuckers are scared. Got to domesticate or explain the grained voice. Got to keep that strange—keeping shit under wraps even though it always echoes. But why is her lipstick engrained in your temple?'¹³⁷). It's sentimental, of course. But not only – it's ghosted. Rebecca Schneider writes that 'postmodern artworks

¹³⁷ Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. p. 104

gather their postmodernity in their ghost dancing (...) positioning themselves relative to an extant, continually eruptive field of precursive modernist imagery and modernist obsession'¹³⁸. Amongst the obsessions Schneider goes on to discuss are obsessions of place and race, obsessions regarding Africa, obsessions regarding bodies and images (and, of course, their pulviscules) located at that crowded intersection where the corrupt and the exploited meets the erotic, the exotic, and the 'pure'. There is a whole story of adulteration here – Magazzini return time and again to obscene stories of domination, of destruction, of spoilage, glitched every time by frivolous tone and juicy papaya: the effect is quite violent. When these unintelligible African female voices come in, when Holiday comes in and dreams today of yesterdays, all the ghosts of that shrill white female voice asking to pick between Ghana and Cameroon, between sea or see, between guns and gomme come with them, as if we were at a double, or even triple funeral.

Apart from the Chinese boxes of mourning evoked above, the temporal criss-cross of *Crollo Nervoso* operates a series of postmodern reversals, and modernist murders re-enacted in postmodern terms are mourned with a still-modern consciousness, as if the end-of-the-world future panorama of the piece allowed different shades of sorrow to not echo each other but co-exist. The 'time and space travelling' of *Crollo Nervoso*, like, after all, all science-fictional time and space travelling, falls in on itself – when the electricity is unplugged – in its place of creation and fruition, reflects back upon itself, that is on 'Italy, 1980'. It's Italy 1980 that is ghosted, of course – by its own war on Somalia, by the American war on Vietnam and, let us call it, 'war on the Moon', but in general by its postmodern western existence in transit.

¹³⁸ Schneider, Rebecca. *The Explicit Body in Performance*. London: Routledge, 1997. p. 21

When the video terminals switch off, when the blinds come down, when the lights cut to black, where else are we? We are thrown back into a corner of the room after a moment spent blinded by the light, as if we had touched an open plug, victims of the fact that ‘the show must go on and it continues to do so, taking the form as often as not of a *nervous over-exposure* of modernity’s haunted corners’¹³⁹.

In its amassment of funerals from elsewhere and in taking upon itself these different shades of sorrow, *Crollo Nervoso* becomes something like a place of not playfulness, but of pity. Self-pity, even. A place in which the theatre has set fire to itself, danced euphorically its self-inflicted sizzle, and then found some sort of atrocious melancholy in the blackened, burnt panorama left behind. Do all works which rely on postmodern ‘cannibalisation’ end up here? Maybe. Cannibalising, after all, is eating a part of yourself. I recall a book by Renato Rosaldo about the strange crux that is imperialist nostalgia: ‘imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody and then mourns the victim’¹⁴⁰. This sort of thinking, somehow, resonates.

Dallas and Irene, alone in a windy epic soundscape with solo synthesizer:

Ride the wave!

Ride the highest wave!

The crest of the wave!

Stay on the crest of the wave!

¹³⁹ Kelleher, Joe. ‘On Self-Remembering Theatres’ [Sui Teatri Autorimembranti]. Ed. Gravano, Viviana, Pitozzi, Enrico and Sacchi, Annalisa. Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008. Emphasis my own.

¹⁴⁰ Rosaldo, Renato. ‘Imperialist Nostalgia: Mourning for what one has Destroyed’. In Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. p. 69

I'm on the crest of the wave!
I love surfing.
I adore surfing.
I love surfing.
I adore surfing.
Stay on the crest of the wave!
I'm on the crest of the wave!
Ride the wave!
Ride the highest wave!
The crest of the wave!

And it sounds like another funeral. John Lennon's voice comes in: *Happiness is a warm gun*, back in the West, arms and cocktails. A Beatles fan once told me that that song came from Lennon seeing the sentence written on a gun magazine and thinking it was mad to say something like that, because for a gun to be warm you have to have just shot something.

Side A: *Do you believe in ghosts?* Side B: *No, but...*

Part Two:
Metropolitan Landscapes

*I Ragazzi di Città*¹⁴¹:

some Preliminary Considerations on the Metropolitan

Let us return to the introduction in Jean Starobinski's 1966 essay 'The Idea of Nostalgia', to that observation: 'emotion is not a word, but it can only be spread abroad through words'¹⁴². A linguistic or etymological approach just can't always cut it: the words that spread abroad an emotion in the then are not necessarily the same ones which spread an emotion about in the now. How we *hear* words, as well as how we understand them, is an historiographical problem. Thirty or forty years, that is the window of time we are dealing with here, rarely alter a word and its usage radically – yet, a surprising amount of shifts take place: words navigate their way into other semantic fields, take on a new sheen or join a new discourse; words may lie forgotten for a few years and then be so powerfully re-appropriated that their initial tone fades from time; sometimes, they lose their ring, the attributes that made them rise to everybody's lips; they age. Sometimes, they disappear almost completely from circulation. Slang moves particularly fast, but so does a whole sub-class of words that aren't slang but move like slang, speaking exclusively to a certain Zeitgeist and then re-entering a sort of linguistic darkness where they patiently await their turn to return.

'Emotion is not a word but it can only be spread abroad through words': at a recent conference on the subject of cultural memory¹⁴³, I found myself in conversation with Gregor

¹⁴¹ I take this title from a lyric: *I Ragazzi di Città stanno all'Ombra dei Bar / I Ragazzi di Città sanno la Verità / Senza sogni, senza libri, aspettano là / L'ora zero, l'ultima, prima del grande bang. / Goodbye, goodbye...* 'The youth of the city hangs out in the shadow of bars / the youth of the city knows the truth / without dreams, without books, they simply await / the zero hour, the last hour before the great bang / Goodbye, goodbye...'. Daiano, *I Ragazzi di Città*, LP. Milan: Ricordi, 1982.

¹⁴² Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia'. Trans. William S. Kemp. Diogenes, June 1966 14: 81-103.pp. 81, 82

¹⁴³ Cultural Memory 2013, Skopje, Centre for Culture and Cultural Studies, 4 / 7th September 2013

Bulc, a scholar investigating a possible archive of queer Ex Yugoslav pop songs. The pop song is a particularly good example of this *spreading abroad*: Bulc's question was 'yes, it sounds unmistakably queer now, but did it *sound* queer then?'. And, in terms of certain lyrics, are we getting a joke that wasn't there? Or was it always there? The conversation shifted to melody, and to the historical ways of *hearing* certain melodies: we spoke of the signifying universes we have just encountered in *Crollo Nervoso*, on which I had just given a paper; we spoke of Italo-Disco, the music of the Adriatic riviera in the early 1980s, of those accents, of that particular use of Spanish and English. And we agreed that Italian disco often sounds 'melancholy' to contemporary ears. I have attempted to ask many listeners and makers of Italo-Disco how it sounded to them *then*: most often, they have forgotten. Was it made with *intentions* of melancholia? Or is there a fortuitous abundance of minor scales? Did you dance then as I dance now? Or have we, to borrow again Sandro Lombardi's expression, 'changed the gels of the era'¹⁴⁴? And if we have, who? Was it me? Was it you?

Similar semantic, affective, atmospherical troubles appear around the word 'metropolitan', a word which appears rarely in strictly contemporary Italian, and whose use is currently relegated mostly to clichés such as 'giungla metropolitana' to say concrete jungle, 'leggenda metropolitana' to say urban legend, or 'sottoproletariato metropolitano' to say urban sub-proletariate, even though in this case the word 'urbano' is much more current – *metropolitano* sounds dated. A click through the archive of any Italian newspaper, for example, can show how the word has shifted from appearing mostly in art and leisure sections into purely bureaucratic and organisational terrain. Even performing a quick search on Italian

¹⁴⁴ Sandro Lombardi in correspondence with myself, Summer 2011

google is quite illustrative of how the word has gone out of fashion: having sorted through the various subway systems, most of the remaining results have to do with the Indiani Metropolitani of the 77 Movement¹⁴⁵, with ‘metropolitan terrorism’ in the 1970s, with metropolitan space in the 1970s and 1980. The book chronicling the festival I am about to usher in here, *Paesaggio Metropolitano* (‘Metropolitan Landscape’), makes an appearance, as do mentions of Renato Nicolini’s concept, in Roman cultural administration, of ‘effimero metropolitano’, which is one of the backgrounds to the metropolitan delineated here¹⁴⁶. These, and various other knick-knacks from the decade: a song called *Gelato Metropolitano* (1977), another called *Crisi Metropolitana* (1981), or Piscicelli’s 1985 *vesuwave* (‘Vesuvian wave’) comedy *Blues Metropolitano*. It seems, then, that a word which exists now almost solely in administrative jargon sketched out quite a different set of emotional, aesthetic, philosophical coordinates at the time. The word ‘metropolitano’ appears in almost every document, of any kind, pertaining to this research: books, magazines, fanzines, scholarly articles, programme notes, funding applications, newspaper reviews, interviews, diary entries, private sketchbooks.

¹⁴⁵ These were the ‘creative wing’ of the various movements which coagulate under the broad term *Movimento 77*. Their activities involved happenings and street theatre and what today we might call flash mobs; although their intents were Dadaist / Situationist, they were effectively mostly relegated to the task of livening up protest marches or, worse, of ‘innocenting’ them.

¹⁴⁶ *Effimero Metropolitano* (‘Metropolitan Ephemeral’) and *Meraviglioso Urbano* (‘Urban Marvellous’) were terms actively employed by Renato Nicolini, cultural administrator for Rome between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, to refer to his views on cultural policy. Although I do not address the extent of Nicolini’s influence throughout this thesis, Nicolini’s influence was important – in touch with the ‘underground’ environment, his administration effectively brought the underground to the streets, exposing and making available to the citizens of Rome practices (such as the poetry festival, the cineclub, and also experimental performance) which had been relegated to much more hidden circuits. Nicolini’s summer festival, the *Estate Romana* (Roman Summer) also had the merit of using Rome’s monuments, many of which lay abandoned or unfrequented by the majorities, for cultural events in the summer evenings. His choices in privileging the ‘ephemeral’ (the event rather than the object) and the ‘marvellous’ (this idea of investing the city with a certain ‘magic’, especially in violent years in which people were going out less and less) undoubtedly supplied some of the terrain for the metropolitan ‘turn’.

*Ladies and Gentlemen, a moment of attention/
Friends, comrades, spectators, another song:
This one's really mad, a little out of the norm /
After our daily bread, a metropolitan ice cream!*¹⁴⁷

The irony, and at the same time the libidinal power in using the word, is that there is no such thing as a 'metropolis' in Italy. Even Rome and Milan, which have lost a sizeable slice of their urban population over the past forty years, were in the early 1980s cities of just under four million and just under two million inhabitants respectively¹⁴⁸: Italy has never had a London or a Berlin, let alone a Tokyo or a New York. Yet, it's exactly Tokyo and New York that seem to be in mind here: the adjective 'metropolitan' evidently reflects a cultural situation more than a demographic or geographical one; still, we shouldn't ignore the suggestions offered by the demographic and the geographical. Economical and social changes in Italy at this time are clearly being set alight very quickly: turning very quickly into trends, into currents of thought and modes of feeling. But it isn't only the Roman or the Milanese that are 'metropolitan': it's everyone, everywhere in the New Spectacular landscape – the metropolitan landscape.

*Total dissociation / metropolitan crisis
And a desire to travel South /
Before I get swept away / by this strange delirium /*

¹⁴⁷ Alberto Camerini, *Gelato Metropolitano*, 45". Altavilla Vicentina: Cramp Records, 1977. As often occurs, this – completely silly – lyric, seems to me to already do some theorising.

¹⁴⁸ Any references to demographic and statistical data throughout this investigation are taken from, or verified in, the national ISTAT archives available at istat.it, unless otherwise stated.

*By yet another neurosis*¹⁴⁹

•

What is the *metropolitan*, then? The most precise, and by its own nature also the vaguest answer we could comprehensively offer would be after Remo Ceserani's term seen earlier: above all, over all, it is a *mood*¹⁵⁰. In the paradigm of an affective historiography, and of an historiography attentive to the pulviscular, a 'mood' is a many-headed beast: it is at the same time a kind of social and cultural attunement, a philosophical current, an ideological crossroads, a type of fashion. While a 'mood' is not a constellation (it is the constellation *and* all of its intergalactic white noise), it is important to sketch out the constellation, because although we could say (and partially, delicately, will say) that in some ways 'metropolitan' is a by-word for postmodernism, it is a specific breed of postmodernism, whose constellation doesn't include *all* the stars from, for example, the Anglophone and Francophone schools of postmodern thought; nor does it inherit aspects from all the Italian schools of postmodern thought, for that matter.

As I have mentioned via, amongst others, Ceserani himself, Monica Jansen, Florian

¹⁴⁹ Giuni Russo, *Crisi Metropolitana*, on *Energie*, LP. Milan: Compagnia Generale del Disco, 1981. Again, we'll see more serious versions of this lyric in 'higher' contexts – but I continue to maintain that the lyric theorises.

¹⁵⁰ Ceserani, Remo. 'Modernity and Postmodernity: A Cultural Change Seen from the Italian Perspective.' *Italica*, 71.3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 369-384. p. 374. The full quote is contained in the 'rough guide' *Everything that Italy* –.

Mussgnug¹⁵¹, postmodernity isn't a concept which went down without difficulties amongst Italians and / or Italian intellectuals. While it may be partially true, as Ceserani has observed, that Italians adapted to the new mood much more zealously than their intellectual superstrata, even the idea of the 'general public' happily buying the concept wholesale seems a little improbable. I would argue, in fact, that it wasn't quite postmodernism that Italians bought, but some tailored form of it, a version obtained by quietening certain attributes and amplifying others: later in this section of this thesis we will see, for example, that there is a preexisting Americophilia, which in more than one way provided a good breeding ground for certain stances; there are also 'Catho-Communist needs for certainty and centrality', as described (in the form of an accusation) by Giorgio Bocca¹⁵² – 'needs', these, which put a spanner in the works of an adaptation of, again for example, the French or the American models of postmodern thinking, made in countries which were more commercially and economically developed, less religious (at least in 'high places'), and which, crucially, weren't contending with the wake of the 77 Movement (although they were still contending with 1968 – but these are two different waves to contend with).

'Metropolitan' as a philosophical construct, which we will see in more detail later as declined by Maurizio Ferraris as 'intense aesthetic experience'¹⁵³, conjugates various slices of constellations which were intersecting in Italy at the time: its socio-economical base is in a kind of transition, in a process of rapid post-industrialisation with all of its euphorias and

¹⁵¹ See, amongst others, Antonello, Pierpaolo and Mussnug, Florian. *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009; Jansen, Monica. *Il Dibattito sul Postmoderno in Italia: in Bilico tra Dialettica e Ambiguità*. Florence: F. Cesati, 2002; Ceserani, Remo. *Raccontare il Postmoderno*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003. I made reference to these texts in the section 'Everything that Italy –'.

¹⁵² Bocca, G. *Il terrorismo italiano 1970-1978*. Milano, Rizzoli, 1978.

¹⁵³ Ferraris, Maurizio. *Tracce: Nichilismo Moderno e Postmoderno*. Milan: Mimesis, 2006. p. 92

discontents; its base is also in the rise of a ‘metropolitan’ class of ‘urbanites’, as we could call them today, whose social extractions and cultural appetites are messing to varying degrees with the class system, the culture industry and the media as they were up until the mid-1970s¹⁵⁴. While its philosophical skeleton generally chimes in tune with French postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard and Baudrillard¹⁵⁵, its junctions, detours and connective tissues are a little less ‘radical’, perhaps – and this is most probably due to a weakened, yes, but only to a certain extent, link with the 77 Movement and with *its* philosophical radicality, that is with the Workerist remodellings of Marxism: Italian postmodernity is unwilling to give up on a certain breed of Marxism *quite yet*. And this may indeed have its roots, as Bocca observes, in a Catho-Communist need for ‘certainties’. Or it may have its roots in the fact that, as Antonio Negri has noted, the 77 Movement came closer than any other to effectively realising the ‘words’ of 1968¹⁵⁶ and, in unison perhaps, in the fact that the PCI was still, at the dawn of the 1980s, the biggest Communist Party in Europe – this demonstrates that the idea of Communism, although weakened, had to co-exist with postmodernity, or that postmodernity (in whatever form) would have a harder time undoing its hold on collective structures of feeling. The reasons for ‘not giving up quite yet’ may also be aesthetic – they may regard modes of feeling. They may have their roots in Perniola’s theory of the ‘army of

¹⁵⁴ Also to be noted here is the rise of a *petite bourgeoisie*, or at least of a new *petite bourgeoisie* – we shall return to these matters.

¹⁵⁵ For a closer look at how Lyotard and especially Baudrillard intersect with the New Spectacular companies’ work, see Giannachi, Gabriella and Kaye, Nick. *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ ‘in Italy – the only country in Europe – the [1977] movement affirmed itself as a social force for a long time, developing a potential which in time entirely demonstrated the meaning on the historical innovations of 1968. It carried an absolutely innovative strength: in 1968, other than words, all that was left of the deepening of cultural criticism, the modification of systems of life, the constitution of communities was a series of often ineffective declarations of intent: but all of this became reality in 1977.’ Negri, Antonio in Balestrini, Nanni and Moroni, Primo. *L’Orda d’Oro 1968-1977: la grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997. p. 632

Pulcinellas', that is in Perniola's very specific declination of 'Italian enigma'¹⁵⁷, apart from and beyond 'Italian difference'¹⁵⁸.

Whichever of these answers (which are only three, amongst many) is correct is not the matter here – what is important to notice is how the *grand récit* doesn't lose its hold, or at least not completely, be it embodied in a religious, political or philosophical form. In remaining with a Lyotardian vocabulary, we could describe the phenomenon of the metropolitan as a *grand récit* of a *petit*, or, even more accurately, as the invention of a superstructure of *grandeur* blowing through, and hence 'holding up' (by which I mean both sustaining *and* interrupting), a *petit récit*. A machine which swallows the micro and turns it into macro, into epic, into gigantic, into historical, sacrificing only a percentage of linearity to the altar of the new mood.

A particularly crystalline illustration of this hesitancy to sacrifice can be found in (some) of the (many) criticisms interceptible in the critical storm around Gianni Vattimo's aforementioned philosophy of weak thought: the 'strength' that weak thought lacks, in the end, is strength of the aesthetic kind. As Giuseppe Stellardi has pointed out, the *weak* position

¹⁵⁷ 'the Italian enigma lies in the fact that the human component is equipped with an external emotionality that does not belong to him or her intimately, but in which they nonetheless participate. Actors and spectators are as much part of the stage scenery as are wings and backcloth: if the scene drips with emotion, they too get a soaking. To a foreign eye seeking inwardness, the single individual, the subject, Italians may appear to be just so many Pulcinellas, exemplars of extreme cynicism. Yet this view isolates all too drastically the person from their environment, from the surrounding world that enfolds and protects them like clothing'. Perniola, Mario. *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*. Trans. C. Woodall. London: Verso, 1995. p. 145

¹⁵⁸ The notion, which has its most famous contribution in an essay by Antonio Negri on Gramsci, Tronti and Muraro entitled 'The Italian Difference', has been elaborated on by many other thinkers, but its meaning shifts, often wildly: for a staging of the debates on difference, see Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, *The Italian Difference*. Melbourne: Transmission, 2009. For Perniola's writings on Italian difference, a different difference, see 'The difference of the Italian Philosophical Culture' in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, New York, 1984 and Hayden White's comment, 'The Italian Difference and the Politics of Culture', in the same journal.

‘isn’t a glorious [one] to be in, but – according to Vattimo – it is a responsible one, and perhaps the only responsible one’¹⁵⁹. Because of this *responsibility* weak thought has to ‘give up’ on a series of important mother-narratives: beauty, religion, politics. But because Vattimo is unable to give up *entirely*, he makes exceptions – and this must tell us something. Vattimo relocates beauty, relocates religion, relocates politics in (micro)narratives from which he has stripped a degree of seduction in order to not give in to metaphysics. This, however, results in (i), narratives which are, unsurprisingly, no longer seductive and (ii), for his critics, in narratives which hide behind a veil which merely *lessens* those seductive narratives or makes them appear fuzzy or unpowered: if the veil is stripped away (that is, if those narratives are re-augmented) Vattimo’s formulations, again for his critics, would go crashing full speed into metaphysics all the same. It is thus that, to pick examples chosen by Stellardi, Vattimo follows Heidegger’s reading of romantic poetry but stops at its most critical juncture: poetry is not ‘essence’, it exists in no ‘beyond’, rather it makes ‘concepts appear on a horizon of mortality’¹⁶⁰. The ‘monument’ is *beautiful*, but not out of grandiosity and glory, rather its beauty resides in the *chiaroscuro*: beauty ‘not as absolute core of meaning but as glimpse of our own provenance, of our own desires’¹⁶¹. *Compromises*.

Strangely, or perhaps not that strangely, what seems to be missing in Vattimo’s philosophy is the body, that is *aesthetics*; or rather, more precisely, it seems as if it is in a state of constant battle with aesthetics. *Feeling* keeps dragging him into metaphysics, so he can

¹⁵⁹ Stellardi, Gisueppe. ‘Pensiero Debole, Nihilism and Ethics, or How Strong is Weakness?’ in Antonello and Musgnug (eds.), *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*. p 89

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 88

¹⁶¹ Ibid p. 89

never *touch* anything. There are, of course, solutions to this double-bind, but they're – again – absurd, paradoxical, and strangely, joyfully nightmarish – our aforementioned 'strange stances', the 'solutions' which supply part of this terrain of inquiry here. Before concentrating on these stances, I want to provide one last example, for added clarity, of what is different between, in this specific case, Vattimo and Perniola, in which Perniola is what I would define as a 'metropolitan' philosopher, that is as a thinker whose work places the body in the middle of this impossible web in which cynicism and mundanity clash with transcendence and metaphysics.

For these purposes, let me draw some attention to a late-1990s / early-2000s debate, to something much more recent but quite exemplary: Vattimo, whose philosophy has provided an incessant thorn in the side of the moral majorities of Italian theology, published a letter in newspaper *La Stampa* in 1999 re-assessing the strings that bind weak thought and Christianity. The letter contains Vattimo's a posteriori admission that, although he had confuted it the 1980s, there *is* a Christian fundament to weak thought, and that it lies in the attempt to find a way to deal with the Heideggerian notion of modernity leading to a dissolution of metaphysics. He goes on to discuss how 'Heidegger went on to build the bases for considering metaphysics as a form of violence: every pretence to reach an ultimate fundament is also a pretence to silence the questions, to impose an in-confutable authority'¹⁶². Two years later, Perniola, whose scholarly formation is also Heideggerian and whose reading of Heidegger has always differed from Vattimo's, published a volume entitled *Del Sentire*

¹⁶² Vattimo, Gianni. 'Il Pensiero Debole e la Tradizione Cristiana', in *La Stampa*, 12th October 1999.

Cattolico ('On Catholic Feeling')¹⁶³, which takes on the challenge, and also the necessity in Perniola's view, to conjugate contemporary philosophy with not Christianity and not Catholicism, but with a 'Catholic way of feeling'¹⁶⁴.

I mention these two texts not to shed light on the debate in itself, although the debate in itself also has its place in the space we are traversing here, but rather to illuminate the differences in what 'matters' to these two schools of thought – they are small differences, but if we zoom in they become quite important. The metropolitan 'mood' privileges the second *kind* of question: the metropolitan's tendency is to *move*, that is to relocate the epistemological and ontological debate into the ground of aesthetics. The metropolitan could be defined as a post-Marxist postmodern aesthetics – and its questions belong to the 'branch', so to speak, of philosophy that is aesthetics, a branch which at the time was beginning to look more and more like a trunk.

Before temporarily abandoning the efforts of Perniola and company, it is interesting to look at *where* the philosophical debates and ideas pertaining to the what we're defining as the metropolitan take place: in reviews like 'Alfabeta' and 'Aut-Aut', in magazines such as 'Differentia', 'NMA', 'Krisis' or in more colourful offerings such as 'Frigidaire' (which also reviewed a lot of Neo-Spectacular work) as well as on many other fanzines which saw the writings of influential theorists and observers such as punk art critic Francesca Alinovi and

¹⁶³ Perniola, Mario. *Del Sentire Cattolico. La Forma Culturale di una Religione Universale*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011. In the final chapter of the text, Perniola notes how Catholic *feeling* has been most forcefully furthered in time and most deeply engaged with outside of the Church and outside of Religion in 20th Century art. It occurs, according to Perniola, when an anonymous (not collective - anonymous) 'it is felt' takes the place of 'I feel'.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Pier Vittorio Tondelli amongst others¹⁶⁵. It is important to remember, then, that we are in the ‘underground’, or in ‘counter-culture’, or in ‘subculture’, however we decide to define it: we are not in the intellectual *superstrata*, but in the intellectual *substrata*. It is in the substrata that all these elements take shape and take hold, and that most of the material studied and discussed in this project takes place, be it philosophical debates, pieces of theatre, economical reflections, reactions to the media landscape, experimentations with new technologies.

This city, by which I mean the city we are talking about here, is a specific kind of invention by a specific group of people, arising out of on a specific set of suggestions, influences and longings which are the product, also, of a specific set of anxieties. By underlining this *sub-* aspect of the work I do not want to undermine the conversation between the groups and their cultural environment and the mechanisms of Italy more widely, since the New Spectacularity, as I hope will become increasingly apparent, is not a theatre made in an ivory tower, or ivory tunnel, or countercultural bubble of experience, although it does have an ‘escapist’ or nostalgic side. Still, it is important to understand and remember where this work was *prepared*, underneath most radars. The metropolitan is, then, the becoming-public of an idea of the city which had dwelled in marginal spaces; it is the city invested with passions prepared in a kind of under-city.

¹⁶⁵ Important to note here is how some of the reviews above are DAMS Bologna offerings. DAMS (Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo) in Bologna was the first multi-disciplinary experimental degree course in the Italian University system, and produced its first wave of graduates between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Many of the protagonists I am in conversation with here (including Alinovi and Tondelli) are DAMS graduates. DAMS is probably partly responsible for creating a cultural situation in which the New Spectacularity could flourish; it is probably also partly responsible for a number of these ‘shifts’ more generally. DAMS (which has changed various acronyms since, and is ever the object of great debate) is a degree course now, but was a sort of Warholian factory then.

•

*We are no longer afraid of the metropolitan horizon.*¹⁶⁶

In the publication of the proceedings from the festival *Paesaggio Metropolitano*, a series of sociologists, critics, thinkers and scholars reflect on the metropolitan landscape with a set of interventions grouped under the headings ‘metropolis and aesthetics’ and ‘metropolis and technique’. In the latter, the opening text by architect and urbanist Marcello Fabbri contains the following considerations:

Let’s avoid losing ourselves in postmodern trends: (...) let us observe the impossibility of a confrontation, thrown as we are by a constant flux of innovative events – the events of the diffused metropolis – which leaves Italian culture behind, still occupied as it is in untangling itself from the ideologies of the 1970s and from the optimism of ‘transition’. Condemned, without guilt, to being the avantgarde in a constant state of contradiction with the avantgarde itself: “the postmodern metropolis annihilates all distinctions between the empirical facts of subjective life and the auratic transcendence of art; it is the locus of a diffused aestheticisation in which the effects produced by artistic experience are the same as those produced by experience in general”. It’s clear that we can’t charge the New Spectacularity with the weakness of a political and cultural context that can’t keep up with epochal transformations (...). We obviously can’t charge the New Spectacularity with the lack of urban policy, which lacks in instruments and in adequacy when it confronts the idea of ‘diffused metropolis’ (sometimes even with a nostalgia for the little world of ‘humble Italy’). The New Spectacularity also can’t take the weight of a poor state of literature, which doesn’t allow to draw correspondences between texts and arguments and opportunities...¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Franco Lombardi in Bartolucci, Giuseppe and Mango, Lorenzo. *Per un Teatro Analitico e Esistenziale*. Turin: Studio Forma, 1980. p. 78

¹⁶⁷ Fabbri, Marcello quoting Ferraris in ‘Senza Paesaggio: Autonomia della Metropoli’ in Bartolucci et al., *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 80

We can't charge it with these states of affairs, no; we can't let it take on this weight. Yet, Fabbri effectively does, and I will, because *it does* – because the New Spectacular strategy involves taking upon itself a series of operations that it perhaps shouldn't, as Fabbri writes, be *charged with*; and besides, is it that unusual for an avantgarde to come out of a poor state of literature, an inadequate cultural policy, a weak political context? Fabbri is perhaps lamenting the vastness of the debates which arose in occasion of *Paesaggio Metropolitano*; he is probably preoccupied by what I referred to earlier as the aestheticisation of all other debates, or as Ferraris writes, the aestheticisation of experience in general. And this preoccupation probably also forms part of the base for the criticism of this theatre as unengaged: not only a seemingly apolitical attitude *on stage*, but also an interference *from the stage* into a great deal of extra-theatrical, extra-performative material, paradoxically framed as unengaged. But we mustn't be overly metaphorical: the city really is changing, the imagination of the city is changing. I think of Baudelaire's *Swan: la forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas! Que le coeur d'un mortel*, 'the shape of the city changes faster, alas, than a mortal's heart'. He continues:

*Paris changes! but naught in my melancholy
Has stirred! New palaces, scaffolding, blocks of stone,
Old quarters, all become for me an allegory,
And my dear memories are heavier than rocks.*¹⁶⁸

The passage to the city involves the traversing of an imaginary space, which is not the city per se, but the metropolitan: not the city, but the cultural spectre which symbolises both

¹⁶⁸ Baudelaire, Charles. *Le Cygne (pour Victor Hugo)* In *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Paris: Poche Gallimard, 2006. p. 71

an escape from the sphere of the provincial (and maybe of Italy, as well) and the fatal embrace with a postmodern solitude which, though feared, could perhaps make space and time correspond. The odd pre-Post ten years, as described earlier by Ortoleva, agitate and disturb *la generazione*. If we are talking of a ‘condemned avantgarde’, we are, after all, talking *avant-garde*, talking of those who have already seen or who have already seen enough by the time the rest of the army appears. The prophetic core of the New Spectacularity (similarly to Futurism) goes crashing full speed into the depths of the city-as-representation, as a fetish but also perhaps as a form of relief, as an imagined elsewhere which cancels any anxieties related to being out of place or out of time with ‘cities’, with ‘Europe’, with ‘technological progress’, with history and ideas of modernity that exist solely as fantasies in the local panorama in which the work *takes place*¹⁶⁹. So the New Spectacularity takes place by not taking place – by not quite taking *its* place, but another.

In the pages that follow I will trace the contours of the metropolitan imagination as it pulses through the New Spectacularity, chronicling how a sense of space changes in the passage from the 1970s to the 1980s. Then, I will zoom out, so that we may keep in mind the outskirts of the city, walking through provincial towns and peripheries and proceeding, finally, up a string of hills. From there, you can see the lights of the city, which are also its luminous pollution.

¹⁶⁹ I use these words, ‘cities’, ‘Europe’, ‘technological progress’ in inverted commas because I am thinking back to Alberto Ronchey’s passage on terror and candour quoted in the passage of this thesis entitled *Everything that Italy* –.

To the rooftops, to the beach: the Inhabitable Image

To escape from the city NOW! and run without ground underfoot.

(Falso Movimento, 1984)

A step back: most of the backdrop for the discourse on the metropolitan, on a supposed ideological vacuum, on the new appetites of the New Spectacularity, is fabricated with its term of comparison in the 1970s. While I have addressed the political, social and economical panorama and its transformations between 1977 and 1984 as years which serve as limits for this investigation, I have spoken little of the theatre of those years. There are many histories of Italian and / or European theatre which go into the subject in more detail than I will here; there are also plenty of histories of Italian theatre which settle the period in a paragraph or two, normally followed by the *de rigueur* paragraph or two on the New Spectacularity¹⁷⁰. In general, however, much more critical attention is devoted to the so-called ‘political’ or ‘engaged’ theatre of the 1970s, probably because of its true and deserved contribution, probably because it sparked more imaginations, probably out of a current *nostalgie du plomb* or because the theatre scene of the 1970s didn’t look like ‘kids who went clubbing’. As such, I feel it is necessary to halt for a moment to at least sketch out some of these specific historical coordinates. I also feel it is interesting to do so now, in the context of a discussion on space, metropolitan or otherwise, in the New Spectacularity because the 1970s also insisted on certain spatial coordinates, although the two spatial panoramas have not, to my knowledge,

¹⁷⁰ Some of the histories of Italian theatre used for this investigation: Alonge, Roberto et al., *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo* Vol. I, II, III. Turin: Einaudi, 2001; Tomasino, Renato, *Storia del Teatro e dello Spettacolo*, Palermo: Palumbo, 2001; Bernardi, Claudio and Susa, Carlo. *Storia Essenziale del Teatro*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005. Other texts, dealing more specifically with the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s are cited throughout this thesis.

been studied alongside each other.

If we are to simplify, to an extent, it seems three ‘currents’ or ‘movements’ or ‘attitudes’ (the three terms work for different cases) dominated the Italian 1970s on the more experimental shores of theatre and performance. There’s a theatre which is following a route inaugurated with Kantor, Barba and Grotowski; another (in some cases the same) following an ‘Italian route’ which is part Carmelo Bene but also part Pasolini in his *Manifesto del Nuovo Teatro*¹⁷¹. An extremely political, militant hard-core of practitioners, again intersecting with the Bene/Pasolini tribe, is making extremely political, militant theatre. The three groups, it must be noted, collide, share practitioners, actors, institutions, and also share ‘masters’ who they look up to: Kantor, Grotowski, Barba, Bene, but also Beck and Malina, and to an extent Elizabeth Lecompte, Robert Wilson – as, I partly imagine and partly know, was the case in many European countries.

As these three major routes develop, three or four definitions, it seems to me, are being used more than others, which I present separately because I hesitate to draw exact correspondences: *teatro immagine*, a label whose meaning has fluctuated enormously in the past forty years, from Barba’s ‘third theatre’ to Boal’s image theatre, to what in the UK we refer to as ‘visual theatre’; *teatro militante* (and here we can see what it means, for example in the Indiani Metropolitani we have seen previously, directly connected to the 77 Movement); *Post-Avanguardia* (Post-Avantgarde) and its famous *cantine Romane*, the ‘Roman basement scene’ (there were basements elsewhere, but Rome led the trend).

Although these terms are deeply embedded in the way we speak of Italian theatre, and

¹⁷¹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo. ‘Manifesto per un Nuovo Teatro’, originally published in *Nuovi argomenti* 9, January / March 1968.

are useful as vague historical markers, they clarify and muddle in equal measures. Barba and Grotowski's influence, for example, is scattered across most if not all of these schools of thought¹⁷²: some take their work on for the way they think of the body, some learn their sense of dramatic text, some concentrate on the more forcefully political aspects of the work, and in many cases that heritage collides or coincides with Pasolini's teachings of *passion and ideology*. The Living Theatre's time in Italy was so deeply formative for so many audiences that it would be simplistic and unjust to relegate their influence to a sphere of people making work which was, as Italian calls it, 'di piazza' or 'in piazza', on the square. Equally, Bene is considered a spiritual father for all, whether their theatre was voiced or unvoiced, text-based or textless, visual or militant, technological or in the street. Carmelo Bene's well-documented influence on experimental theatre in Italy again is something is too broad to consign to the memory of one or another tendency.

To conclude this kaleidoscope of influences, Bob Wilson is overwhelmingly cited as a forerunner of the New Spectacular and of the Post-Avantgarde, an influence which, although I see it, I have questioned over the years of my research. As is the case with the Living Theatre, it is clear that Wilson's work in Italy was exemplary, in the sense that it provided an *example* – and as such, it is certain that it opened up a lot of imaginations and showed certain spectators from a certain generation that a certain theatre was possible. Nevertheless, tracing a direct filiation between Wilson's theatre of the 1970s and what was to become the New Spectacularity strikes me as a manoeuvre which provides an inaccurate picture of the work,

¹⁷² Both La Gaia Scienza and Magazzini Criminali (then Il Carrozzone) were, in fact, participants in Grotowski's now famous two-week workshop on the occasion of Luca Ronconi's 1975 Venice Biennale on the then completely abandoned island of San Giacomo in Paludo in the Venice lagoon.

undermines the work's rootedness in the Italian context, and xenophilically dismisses its own inventive quotient; as, to varying degrees, all of these labels do.

As the constellation of influences reveals itself as never perfectly distinct, it seems it would be helpful if the definitions we use for the 1970s were also taken at a certain distance: the *basements*, the *militant* work, the *image theatre*, the *Post-Avantgarde* and even, later in the 1970s, the New Spectacularity itself are all happening at the same time, often with the same people, as well as with similar references and intellectual landscapes. What *does* change, to an extent, what can perhaps tell us something is *where*: where the work happens. Only a small part of it happens in the theatre. The rest happens in the street, in the public square, in the form of happenings, actions, processions, protest marches: in the *centri sociali*, the squatted social centres and cultural associations which defined that era of occupations; in forests, in fields, in the natural environment and in the basements. What all of these spaces have in common is that they are conceptually anchored to the intentions of the theatre that *goes on there* – as much as, in doing the work of cataloguing history, we may want to push the political, ecological, ideological aspects of these choices of space and place, we also have to take them into account as aesthetic operations. Of course the field, or the forest, lends itself to a certain type of ideological discourse; it is easy to omit, though, that it also holds an atmospherical and aesthetic suggestion, a seductive power (although it may have been unfashionable to talk about seductive powers in the 1970s).

The basement scene is the most directly connected to the New Spectacularity, overlapping with the New Spectacularity both chronologically and aesthetically – many early works of Neo-Spectacular groups occurred on this almost mythical 'basement circuit'. What

is interesting in looking at the late years of the basements, that is the years between 1977 and 1980 – which are the years we could call the heart, as well as the eclipse, of the Post-Avantgarde – is that (i) many of its makers had penetrated into other spaces, such as galleries and theatres, having seduced other, more official, circuits. (ii), much of the work that took place there was highly experimental, often highly visual and often highly conceptual work which, in the rear-view mirror of the memory of the New Spectacularity, seems to have sewn the seeds of the *wave*, appearing less overtly or traditionally political than the notion of ‘basement scene of the 1970s’ might lead us to believe. (iii) lastly, that because the basements and the New Spectacularity have a lot of artists in common, it is difficult to single out, since we are talking also of groups of friends, who was supposedly ‘engaged’ and who wasn’t.

In a conversation with Alessandra Vanzi from La Gaia Scienza in April 2011, Vanzi explained to me how they (La Gaia Scienza) used to go and do *Cronache Marziane* (‘Martian Chronicles’, 1977) every evening after having come off the street at a protest march, usually having been attacked, either verbally or physically, by the police or by the fascists. She was keen to impress on me that these ideas about experimental theatre, these dreamy visual shows, the aesthetics of lightness *and* the repression on the streets were all part of the same concept and of the same life. Stressing that these two lives were the same life, Vanzi made clear how it’s a mistake to think of these gestures and actions as unbound to each other, as if they had been different people by day and by night¹⁷³.

Vanzi’s words are precious, because they help us complicate the picture both for the allegedly engaged 1970s and for the allegedly unengaged 1980s, where a certain

¹⁷³ Conversation with Alessandra Vanzi, Rome, 2011.

historiography might urge us to stay on the straight and narrow. Most of the protagonists of the New Spectacularity are, quite simply, the second generation of the basement scene: their theatre was always slightly distanced from the original, older scene, but they were nevertheless accepted and nurtured in the basement environment. Perhaps the basement scene ended because its political moment ended – both Nicola Viesti and Dante Cappelletti have argued how the importance, and the allure, of the basement was always rooted in a certain idea of *clandestinity*¹⁷⁴, and in effect many other operations were basement-bound in the 1970s, such as Cine-Forums, debating clubs, dancing clubs, as well as, of course, an array of *truly* clandestine activities. What I want to draw attention to is that there is not only an ideology of the basement (poverty of materials, a DIY approach, a punk-like experimentation, fiercely conceptual underpinnings) but also an aesthetics of the basement (same again: poverty of materials, a DIY approach, a punk-like experimentation, fiercely conceptual underpinnings), and it is an aesthetics which, like punk (but differently from British punk: Italy's punk is hardly ever as nihilist as British punk), chimes in tune with subversion, with sabotage, with revolt, by locating itself *literally* in the underground.

•

An event which becomes powerfully symbolic in retrospect, then, is the move La Gaia Scienza operated between 1977 and 1978, that is between *Cronache Marziane* which Vanzi refers to above and *Una Notte sui Tetti* the following winter: a move from the basement to the

¹⁷⁴ Viesti, Nicola. *Altri Anni Settanta: Luoghi e Figure di un Teatro Irregolare*. Contribution for the Cristina Valenti's DAMS module 'Organizzazione ed Economia dello Spettacolo', 2001 / 2002. Available at unibo.it and Cappelletti, Dante. *La Sperimentazione Teatrale in Italia tra Norma e Devianza*. Rome: Rai Eri, 1981.

rooftop. *Cronache*, from Majakovski, was shown at the most influential Roman basement of them all, the Beat 72. La Gaia Scienza had created a complex scenography which didn't really fit in the basement; apparently, it was very hot, the audience sweated squashed along the walls of that famous underground room on Via Giocchino Belli. A few months later, on a cold night in December, La Gaia Scienza were running across a connected set of rooftops on which white neons barely illuminated the way, amongst the drop of the roofs and the TV antennas; they shouted out passages from Rilke at each other: love, dance, death.

While many shifts out of the basement take place between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, shifts both more and less extreme, the switch between *Cronache Marziane* and *Una Notte Sui Tetti* strikes me as particularly significant because it isn't only a movement through physical space, but also, and fundamentally, a movement through imaginary space. In the photographs, we have the basement, its rough walls, Vanzi in a white dress leaning out of an arched doorway, there's a palm tree on stage, a persian carpet. A few months later: the rooftop, the cold, the dark, the panorama of the city, the lights of Rome all around 'which look like an upside down sky'¹⁷⁵, the 'real' sky, the sound of cars, the antennas, the neons – the visual and atmospherical coordinates pertain to completely different languages. What makes this shift particularly charged is that La Gaia Scienza don't go back: they go to parks, to plazas, they too, in their own way, change their name, 'change their gels' like other groups did. A case of *metropolitanisation*? *Romanticisation*? *Spectacularisation*?

To give an overview of the years that follow, I have compiled a brief list of Neo-Spectacular spaces, some of which I shall return to over the course of this writing, some of

¹⁷⁵ Bargiacchi, Enzo. 'Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza'. In *Teatroltre / Scrittura Scenica* 22, 1980. pp. 48-71. p. 53

which I will not. This list doesn't include theatres, of which there are many; it also doesn't include the environments created therein. In what concerns Falso Movimento, I list only a few environments and video-environments.

- **Magazzini Criminali**: basement; private apartment; gallery; street in Rome; photography salon (exhibition centre); courtyard / garden / parking lot; tunnel; stadium; pasta factory; beach; beach / fairground / fascist holiday camp / gas station; abattoir.
- **La Gaia Scienza**: basement; private apartment; rooftop; desecrated church; street in Varese; Piazza del Popolo in Rome; Villa Borghese in Rome; converted swimming pool complex; gardens.
- **Antonio Syxty**: gallery; laundrette; private apartment (x 3); garage; gas station; TV studio; catwalk; bar; nightclub; Castello Sforzesco in Milan; photography studio; ice factory.
- **Societas Raffaello Sanzio**: apartment; gallery (x 2); art school; basement; museum; converted swimming pool complex; school courtyard.
- **Falso Movimento**: video-rooftops; video-kitchen; video-bathroom; video-street; video-American landscape; video-trains, video-swimming pool etc. NB, some of these take place in nightclubs.
- Other examples: gardens (**Parco Butterfly, Tradimenti Incidentali**); car park (**Taroni-Cividin**); field / lawn (**Padiglione Italia**); gallery / outdoor gallery (**Dark Camera**); video-environments / laser-environments / light-environments (**Krypton**) bus station (**Del Bosco-Varesco**).

I provide this list, I pan these spaces, not only to draw attention to the radical differences that exist between the spaces and places¹⁷⁶ above and the realities of the 1970s

¹⁷⁶ I am aware that in geography, architecture, spatial studies and other disciplines a careful effort has been made to distinguish 'space' from 'place', and that these words have a long and intricate history of their own; nonetheless, I will use the two terms almost interchangeably here: for every time I am interested in space I am also interested in its placeness, and vice-versa. All the spaces spoken of here are of interest to me, and to the artists whose work I am discussing, as envelopes of architecture, activity and affect.

discussed previously, but also because I am interested in how these spaces speak back to the notion of the *metropolitan*, of the intense aesthetic experience of the imaginary ‘diffused’ city. As I have already stated, in elaborating this notion of the metropolitan we needn’t be overly metaphorical: the city is not only an imaginary entity but essentially and forcefully a geographical one – it is a geographic entity which is being physically explored and interfered with. The ‘map’ above shows how certain areas of the city are being, to use a term from our digital present, ‘augmented’; and the areas of the city which are getting this treatment are not at all spaces of *clandestinity*, they are not forests, they are not squats, they are not basements. Most of the spaces, in fact, range between the institutional / municipal (school, swimming pool complex, museum, holiday camp), spaces of ‘leisure’ and media (nightclub, gallery, TV studio, catwalk, photography salon) and another category which we could simply refer to as *vast*, often public, spaces (beach, square, public gardens, monuments, factories, rooftops, gas stations, fairgrounds). All evocative spaces then – spaces which flee their physical locations and become *loci* in the collective imagination. They are spaces, perhaps, which have a particular *genius loci*: spaces which speak of a certain desolateness, of a certain solitude; spaces with a certain cinematographic quality, or spaces which are cinematic clichés; spaces, also, whose identity, whose ring, whose uses, whose atmospheres shift radically between day and night, between the time of the theatre and that of the everyday.

It is worth noting how some of the spaces of the New Spectacularity are not necessarily secluded, but legally speaking, *private* – I refer especially to the apartments. The apartment dramas which constellate the work (there are between six and seven ‘official’ pieces in total, to my knowledge) are also interesting in feel, because they are somehow

secret, in a sense, like the basement. The line between secrecy and exclusivity is a fine and dangerous one. It is possible to think of also these spaces as *clandestine*, of course: what are we doing in a factory, in a slaughterhouse, at a gas station, in a public garden at night? Indeed, what are we doing in a stranger's house at night, walking unaccompanied through the rooms, inspecting books and objects? It has probably been an error to think that that 'certain idea of clandestinity' stopped producing; it would be more accurate to say that clandestinity *moved*, as did everything else. It's the word *clandestinity* that goes out of fashion, turning into *metropolitan*, turning into *romantic* – but clandestinity was always romantic, wasn't it? What is lost, then, aesthetically, politically, in travelling from the basement to the rooftop, and what, if anything, is gained? What is lost, to remain true to our example, in the passage from reciting Mayakovsky underground to reciting Rilke on the roof?

•

Tango Glaciale departs from the metropolis and shrinks until it arrives at its nucleus, the house (from the outside to the inside, from the architecture to the furnishings) and then explodes very far away, in a cosmic dimension where space and time mix their different lines, where the urban landscape opens to geographical vertigo (Argentine tangos, asiatic jungles and lunar landscapes) and the electronic rhythm is broken by the memory of other times, of other eras. To escape from the city NOW! and run without ground underfoot.¹⁷⁷

The words above were published by Falso Movimento in the programme notes

¹⁷⁷ Falso Movimento. Programme notes (in English) for *Tango Glaciale* at La Mama, New York 1984 and at the Mickery Theatre, Amsterdam 1984.

accompanying the performance *Tango Glaciale* when it travelled to La Mama in New York and to the Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam. They are, like many other programme notes of the era, powerful, scintillating little morsels of metropolitan *mood*, but the reason I put them on the table now is to point at certain New Spectacular mechanisms which I have come to identify as bound to a notion of ‘inhabitability’ of the image.

Falso Movimento’s theatre provides a very good example to begin looking at this idea, because their theatre was deeply bound up with and dependent on the use of projection, the use of drawn or filmed environments and the use of green screen or chromakey technology – instruments which, although this theatre is often cited as ‘technological’, are actually quite rare in the panorama of the Neo-Spectacular as a whole. Falso Movimento insisted on the idea of the ‘cinema at the theatre’¹⁷⁸, or of the ‘cinema in three dimensions’, by which they weren’t (or weren’t solely) referring to a *cinematic* quality (which can be intercepted in many other works by other companies). Rather, quite literally, they were interested in these projected or chromakeyed environments in two dimensions as spaces for the three-dimensional performers to move within. The projected or chromakeyed image in Falso Movimento (and in others, such as Krytpon) is not a theatrical ‘backdrop’ then, although its existence is screen-bound: it is a *set* in two dimensions and as such does not constitute a referential elsewhere of the live, but an elsewhere which is to be counted, in the logic of the performance, as completely integrated in the *live* mechanism and experience of the show.

The company entertained a fortunate relationship with Italian public television RAI,

¹⁷⁸ Martone and Mele in Giannachi, G. and Kaye, N. *Staging the Post-avant-garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*. Oxford: P. Lang, 2002. p.42

which produced some of the group's pieces in TV format¹⁷⁹. Mario Martone, who led the company, was out to renew the idea of theatre on television, which has been (as is the case in many countries) a classic RAI format since the 1960s, via an approach which could stretch both media both ways, in which the theatre would have to be 'made for TV' and TV would have to offer its potentialities as a medium to the theatre. This was a short lived but potentially very fruitful affair, which destabilised both media in challenging ways, akin to the experiments carried out by early Channel 4 in the UK: although working with analogue instruments in an analogue logic, these operations were subversive in what they asked both the TV spectator and the theatre spectator to *do*, that is in *how* they asked the spectator / viewer to *watch*. It is interesting that many of these interactive backdrops were drawn, by comic strip artists or illustrators: by having a live actor interact with a drawn kitchen on television, the theatre set into motion a technical and affective strangeness all round – a strangeness which would completely mess with perceptions of the live, of the comic strip or cartoon, with the traditional mediated, 'fictional' image of TV. Some of these films were filmed without tricks of the camera or experimental angles of any kind: the effect was that the drawn kitchen, to stick to this example, was an alternative version of what you would see in a sitcom or soap opera.

Effectively then, it wasn't *realism* that Falso Movimento were chasing by insisting on these technicalities – they weren't merely escaping from the theatre building. They weren't projecting, let's say, crashing waves on the walls of the auditorium because they wanted the

¹⁷⁹ It is tempting, in the narrative of Falso Movimento, to imagine that the theatre was a 'way in' to the world of film, which Mario Martone, the director of the group, eventually settled on by becoming a very successful film director – but the operation strikes me as more sophisticated than a mere *frustration*.

audience to temporarily imagine themselves at sea. Falso Movimento's backdrops depict scenes which don't exist anywhere, environments which are unfilmable in the real world – it is important to understand that another kind of imagination is at work. Indeed – to stay with crashing waves – when the New Spectacularity wanted crashing waves, it took its theatre to them or more accurately, it made its theatre there, it made its theatre with them – what we don't really find in Neo-Spectacular work is the setting up of 'references'. If the theatre goes to crashing waves, the crashing waves, being live and 'real', are no longer a backdrop or an environment *within* which to *place* a narration, but become part of the narration itself, if not, in fact, the most important part of the machinery of the theatre which takes *its* place *there*.

In both of Magazzini's 'beach pieces', a section of *Blitz* (1980) and *Notti Senza Fine* (1982), the beach is not a backdrop, but the very subject and method of the performances; in these pieces, actions *for* a beach take *their* place on a beach, where the beach is the indisputable protagonist, in the (beachily post-Kantorian) logic of the 'study for environment'¹⁸⁰. My impression here is that *Blitz* and *Notti Senza Fine*, as well as, to return to the top of this discussion, *Una Notte sui Tetti* on the rooftops of Via Flaminia, should be taken as belonging to exactly the same kind of encounter, kind of thinking, kind of affective

¹⁸⁰ The whole title of *Blitz* is *Blitz: Space Patrols, Mimetisations for Environment*. Magazzini Criminali have a history, developed in the mid to late 1970s, of performances known as 'studies for environment', notably *Ombra Diurna* ('Diurnal Shadow', 1977), *Vedute di Porto Said* ('Views of Port Said', 1978) and *Rapporto Confidenziale* ('Classified Report', 1978). Although relatively minor pieces in Magazzini's production as a whole, these three pieces embody the crux of the passage from Carrozzone (the company's first name) to Magazzini Criminali, constituting the passages which mark the group's change of *method*: implicit in the notion of the 'study for environment' is that the performances are at the *service* of site, moving the work from a narrative dramaturgy (including a dramaturgy of images) to a dramaturgy of atmosphere and of sensation (these performance are where heat, humidity, shadow, vastness install themselves, in my view, as coordinates along which to *perform*). I add in passing that Mendini will conspire with Magazzini precisely for these reasons: the two pieces the designer and the company make together between 1979 and 1980, *R. Polaroid* and *Mobile Infinito / Zone Calde* are sensorial inhabitations, by the company, of 'prepared environments'. *Prepared*, like a piano would be prepared, by the architect / designer.

spectatorial strategy as Falso Movimento's *Tango Glaciale* with its surplus of comic strip cities and apartments (a scene in *Tango Glaciale* for RAI, fittingly, sees the performers jumping across comic strip rooftops like comic strip superheroes). In this kind of encounter, kind of thinking, kind of affective spectatorial relationship, the cinema perhaps plays a more important role than that of architecture. Even painting plays a more important role than that of architecture: this *inhabitability* has at its heart a sort of coincidence of space and image which results not in a *flattening* but rather in a constant switching back and forth between the properties of two and three-dimensionality, reliant on a kind of movement akin to that gesture of tilting a holographic postcard. *Inhabitability*, which dominates the metropolitan 'strategy', is not quite *site-specificity*, or if it is, it is a very specific breed of it. At the same time, it is not quite *immersion* – it is something similar to both, but other to either.

•

In the vast body of work devoted to understanding site-specificity in its complex relationships with performance¹⁸¹, the notion of *inhabitation* tends to refer to something which the performance *does to* a certain space. Not a housing nor a hosting, rather a relationship in which all the active verbs are employed by the performance and the space's role is usually passive: we do this here, because here is the right place to do it. With this I refer not only to more traditional views on site-specificity (Pearson opens his monograph with a quote from Patrice Pavis, in which he describes the insertion of a *text* in a certain charming

¹⁸¹ I base my views especially on Mike Pearson's *Site Specific Performance* (Palgrave 2010) and Nick Kaye's *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (Routledge 2000).

and powerful space¹⁸²), but also to more subtle experiments which work on the attunement to space, on a responding to or talking back to space. Another, different focus on the notion of ‘inhabitation’ in much of the discourse surrounding site-specificity regards the ‘actual’ inhabitants of a space, indicating the action of those who a certain space *belongs to* versus those who have come, the troupe, the travelling company, which makes differently inhabitable by way of their own ‘other’ inhabitation the spaces of the everyday of a certain context or community. This momentary inhabitation leaves a trace which is retained by the space in the imagination of the spectators after the circus, to speak romantically, has left town. But as Fiona Wilkie has asked, how long does one have to dwell in a certain space before his/her being there can be regarded as a practice of ‘inhabitation’? Because performance, according to Wilkie, *moves across* more than it *dwells within*, do spaces belong to those who arrive or to those who stay? Or indeed, do they belong to anyone? Wilkie quotes Doreen Massey asking: ‘if everywhere is moving, then where is here?’¹⁸³

A notion of inhabitability, more than a question of ‘specificity’, begs the question of who the subject is, of who or what does the inhabiting. So to question it vis à vis the Italian New Spectacularity, we have to ask ourselves *whose* inhabitation we are referring to in the first place: the paradigm I refer to here as that of *inhabitability* does not refer to the *inhabitability* of a space by a performance, but to the *inhabitability* of the performance as a whole by the performers and the spectators. I refer not to the insertion of action into site, rather to the insertion of the human element, the body (be it the body of the performer or the

¹⁸² Pavis, Patrice in Pearson, Mike. *Site Specific Performance*. New York: Palgrave, 2010. p. 7

¹⁸³ Although I am thinking of a number of Wilkie’s contributions to this debate, I refer here to Wilkie, Fiona. ‘Site-specific Performance and the Mobility Turn.’ *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22:2, 203-212 and even more specifically to Massey in Wilkie, *ibid.*, p. 205

body of the spectator) into the *spectacle*, which includes action and includes site, which is essentially ‘everything’, and which is essentially the *image*, the representation. It is worth thinking back to Falso Movimento’s practices again, then, before repeating Massey’s question, ‘if everything is moving, then where is here?’ and answering it like this: ‘if everything is moving, here is not here’. Even the here (as in the many site-specific cases above) is not exactly here, but still an elsewhere: I return to Maurizio Ferraris and to his ideas of the metropolitan offering an ‘intense aesthetic experience’ in which ‘aesthetic experience differs in no way from *real, lived* experience’¹⁸⁴. If we *are* here, we are *intensely* here, and *this, intense*, here is a *here* into which we have breathed an *elsewhere*.

In a sense the process, the psychological mechanism, of *inhabitability* works in a way which takes advantage of the liveness and the ephemerality of theatre to do something much more akin to the experience of cinema or of television but which, dangerously because much more convincingly, implicates the body¹⁸⁵. What is triggered is a certain *falling into* the image, into the events as they unfold on stage, into a hyperreal which is effectively unreal; a switch, an *emotional transfer* that happens with the tools of escapism – the reasons why Brecht thought it important to demolish walls. The site-specific works of the New Spectacularity do *outside* what they also attempt to do *inside* the theatre, executing a process of construction of an-other followed by the act of convincing, seducing, tempting the spectator into this other. If the cinema is in three dimensions, the trick it plays is cruel: to make believe that the cinema is inhabitable and that hence that the body, in its finite here and

¹⁸⁴ Ferraris, Maurizio. *Tracce: Nichilismo Moderno e Postmoderno*. Milan: Mimesis, 2006. p. 93

¹⁸⁵ By which I am not, at all, arguing that the body isn’t implicated in the experience of the cinema or of television (we shall return to this on a number of occasions).

now, can enter an other landscape, cityscape, dreamscape, other-*scape* unbound to its own spatio-temporal logics. The cinema in three dimensions makes believe that its practice of ‘dwelling’ has a currency in the real, perhaps that it could even last somehow, or continue.

My use of the term *inhabitability*, rather than ‘inhabitation’ here, refers, then, to something pertaining to similar genealogies to those of site-specific practices, but removed from these examples by way of an emphasis placed on the space and on the spectator before it is placed on the performance in itself and those who make it. *Inhabitability*, rather than inhabitation, points to a potentiality rather than a state of affairs: a sort of *proving* that an imaginary space can become ‘real’. The inhabitation of the image or the inhabitation of a space work on similar imaginary mechanisms: the theatre is charged with proving that *here* is an *elsewhere* – but of course it is still *here*. The spectator holds a sort of ‘proof’ that this elsewhere is open to inhabitation because that spectating is spectating of ‘real’ people moving within it – the people inside the cinema, the people inside the painting, the people inside the image. It is up to the spectator (the *new* spectator) to affectively and imaginatively invest, to *believe* that this film is real. At the same time, we can’t speak, with the New Spectacularity, of *immersive* work the way we speak of *immersion* today – this theatre time and again offers only a spectating (an ‘only’ which strikes me as ‘enough’). The New Spectators are never called to participate, to physically enter the playing space, to *move into* the imaginary world happening before their eyes. They’re ‘only’ *there*, of course. Which is to say *here*. Which is also to say not here at all.

For these reasons I speak of an emotional transfer more similar to that operated by television and for these reasons I place so much importance, in entering this discussion, on

Falso Movimento's work: the process of *making inhabitable* a certain place, of *proving* its inhabitability, differs in no way from the process of making inhabitable a surface, be it a film, be it a painted backdrop, be it an invisible image. In these processes, each image is afforded the properties of an environment, and each environment, in turn, the properties of an image – and the most important of these properties, in both cases, is the *ability* to make present that which is not, to thread the here and now into the weave of an infinite number of other possible thens and theres by way of an operation which culturally, aesthetically, affectively *reifies*, or attempts to *reify*, an *atmosphere*. Environments become *intense* aesthetic experiences: they call in a series of speckles of dust, a series of brilliances, a series of shadows. The interception of these pulviscular entities, the ability to *feel* them, to sign this specific narrative contract is at the very core of what Carlo Infante has called the 'new sensibility' of the 'new spectator', desired and required by the theatre of the New Spectacularity¹⁸⁶.

The intense experience of the theatre, in this design, becomes similar to what Didi-Huberman refers to as the experience of 'a surface of divination'¹⁸⁷: one that rather than pertaining to a representational code, *opens up* representation by offering an image that 'captures the gaze only to provoke an uncontrollable chain of images capable of weaving a virtual net'¹⁸⁸ around the scene depicted, but also around he or she who does the looking, and which thus gives way to what he later refers to as 'a place where a metaphysics is possible'¹⁸⁹.

These are spectatorial modes which Didi-Huberman also refers to as *whacks*, and they are

¹⁸⁶ Infante discusses this and other notions in Infante, Carlo. 'L'Ultima Avanguardia, tra Memora e Oblio'. *Culture Teatrali* 2/3, Primavera – Autunno 2000: *Quarant'Anni di Nuovo Teatro Italiano*. pp. 275-291. p. 288

¹⁸⁷ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. Trans. J. Goodman Philadelphia: Penn State Press, 2005. p. 24

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 24

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 29

similar to what Perniola calls a *soaking*: ‘actors and spectators are as much part of the stage scenery as are wings and backcloth: if the scene drips with emotion, they too get a soaking’¹⁹⁰. I propose we see the *inhabitability* of image-space as performed by the New Spectacularity in the light of these ideas, affording the spectacle (and hence the environment, for the two are one) the agency to *soak* the new spectator, to make a metaphysics possible. If the Neo-Spectacular groups are indeed, as I maintain, using ‘real’ physical space by imbuing it with elsewhere-ness, those spaces are playing the same role as chroma-key, they are transforming the environment by way of inhabitability, *setting* the real bodies in the unreal locus of the theatre.

¹⁹⁰ Perniola, Mario. *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*. Trans. C. Woodall. London: Verso, 1995. p. 145

Dark in the Piazza

Pordenone può essere Londra, ma Londra non può mai essere Pordenone!

(*Pordenone: the Great Complotto* compilation, 1980)¹⁹¹

As we delve deeper into the notion of the metropolitan, and as we begin to delineate what a metropolitan *imagination* may be and may look like, let us concern ourselves for a moment with something fascinating and notice how a great deal of imaginary and affective force is gathered by and for the metropolitan not in the physical space of the city, but in the diffused city which indeed is ‘here and also not here at all’. It is so diffused that it encompasses villages, provinces, seaside, countryside. The spectacular speculations of the metropolitan have their counterpoint not only in the city as it appears and is experienced on the cusp of the 1980s as place and as image, but also and crucially in non-urban space, which plays a vital role as term of comparison, very often as locus of *origin*, as yet another declination of elsewhere, apart from very concretely providing *stages*, places where the work is *shown*.

Bonnie Marranca wrote a short and very personal account on the pages of *Performing Arts Journal* in 1981 of the Santarcangelo festival which had taken place that summer, a piece entitled *Light in the Piazza*¹⁹². In the article, Marranca speaks only briefly of the theatre, providing an overview of the companies present (and recording the absence of Falso Movimento and Magazzini Criminali); what she mostly concentrates on is the atmosphere of

¹⁹¹ ‘Pordenone can be London, but London can never be Pordenone!’. The sentence appears in the sleeve notes for the *The Great Complotto* compilation of punk and new wave bands from Pordenone (Bologna: Italian Records, 1980), and will then end up in various songs and interviews by the bands themselves.

¹⁹² Marranca, Bonnie. ‘Light in the Piazza: Santarcangelo, Italy.’ *Performing Arts Journal* 6.1 (1981), pp. 136-139

Santarcangelo: indeed, the light in the piazza. Marranca speaks of old ladies baking the traditional *piadine* in Piazza Ganganelli, of how they go well with a glass of wine; she describes the young backpackers who flock to Santarcangelo during the festival, reminding her of 1960s American music festivals. She marvels enthusiastically at how not only in Santarcangelo, but in Italy more generally, ancient buildings were being used to host new work, and at how the Santarcangelo Festival, which at the point of Marranca's writing was eleven years old, had expanded into the neighbouring towns of Verrucchio, Coriano, Rimini, Poggio Berni, Torriana. She concludes:

In Italy one cannot escape the experience of public space. Any theatrical performance there finds its way into the old squares, streets, and monument sites that conspire with more contemporary events to whisper a knowledgeable sigh through the experience, a sigh to remind them that they live in time, that even space has a history that analyzes art. I think I had to go to Italy to find out why I was never moved much by street theatre, and outdoor performances here. A few mimes, or a dance company performing in the Time-Life plaza on 6th Avenue at lunchtime just doesn't do it for me.¹⁹³

Two things are of great interest to me here: (i) the notion of any performance in Italy 'whispering a knowledgeable sigh through the experience' via its 'conspiring with' site: Marranca as Neo-Spectator, equipped with Neo-Sensibility, offers her take on the paradigm on inhabitability; and (ii), on the other side of this but forcefully at the same time, the almost picturesque quality of the picture, the almost exoticising tone of the story-telling, which ushers us into thinking of the importance of the Romagna region, and of the impossibility of framing it.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 139

I first read Marranca's 1981 article at the Santarcangelo Festival in 2011, thirty years after its publication, in the long, dull lull between the first weekend of the festival and the second, during which I visited the same installations over and over to escape the late afternoons; during which I managed to obtain a pass to the Premio Scenario competition, for want of some performance; during which I alternated quiet lonely nights in Santarcangelo and noisy solitary walks around Rimini, which I escaped to for the sea, which although dirty and crowded offered some respite from the heat, but also because it was of great comfort to me to be amongst holiday-makers for a while rather than festival-goers. It was comforting to be with Russian families in cheap hotels, and hungover clubbers having their first coffee at two in the afternoon. The soundscape of RAI Radio Tre's broadcasts from Piazza Ganganelli, the scholarly conversations with critics and artists with intervals of classical music, worked better when montaged with the traffic jams of cars playing pounding techno, with mothers shouting to children, with aerobics classes piped out of the public broadcast systems on the beach.

As I wandered alone, endlessly, around Santarcangelo in a self-imposed twelve-day provincial hiatus, Marranca's article struck a chord with two conversations and two pieces of theatre from those days: a conversation with a woman called Clarissa, who later became a friend, who was a civil engineer who dealt with motorways (she had worked on the Cesena bypass, which had recently been inaugurated and whose presence had shocked me as I drove to Santarcangelo). Clarissa also ran a small independent cinema in Cattolica, further south on the riviera, called the Snaporaz. She painted a good picture of life in the *provincia*: she was in love with the Romagna region and with her life there; she felt a kind of privilege in knowing the territory deeply, in the boring cold winter and in the endless stream of parties, cinema,

theatre of the summer. The other conversation was with a man called Mirko, who was selling records at the Saturday market – we spent an afternoon together, and he told me about how all the expensive and rare LPs that he was selling were from local bands, of how he knew them all, of how he used to play with them as a teenager. He knew how much I loved that music – and he was eager to narrate how it was that that region, Emilia, Romagna and its Adriatic riviera, had produced it. Mirko was proud to declare *there* was where *it* happened: and now the self-produced futurist synthetic efforts of past teenagers went for 70 Euros, and nobody was buying them.

In those days, I saw two pieces which for the way they whispered a knowledgeable sigh into site made more, other, impressions, which now, in memory, intersect with those conversations, with Marranca's article and with my work in those days on the New Spectacularity: Fanny and Alexander's *T.E.L.*, which took place in the Autorimessa Buzzi – Unicem, an abandoned industrial site on an A-road, broken glass and sleepy machinery in the middle of nothing, a bar across the road which feels like we could be not a ten-minute drive, but a thousand miles away from any kind of 'piazza' atmosphere, and which rang much more true with some of the music Mirko was selling – it spoke a language of bleakness and of desolation, while at the same time smelling of countryside, and at the same time having a strange American 'road-movieness' to it. The other performance was a piece by two girls who were no older than eighteen, who went under the company name Fuochi; they performed a short piece called *Amabo Te* in the archeological museum, which is a sort of anthropological museum, containing artefacts from those who once upon a time were the people of Romagna. The building has a 1990s institutional feel, more like a school than like a museum. To get

there, you walk through residential Santarcangelo: little cement blocks containing two to three apartments, or so-called ‘villette bifamiliari’, little villas for two families, with geraniums and dogs. A few Coop supermarkets; a few non-picturesque, sometimes even squalid, bars and bakeries.

•

I take this detour into some of my own recent impressions of Santarcangelo because what Mirko who sells records wanted to stress about certain breeds of subcultural pop music in the region is also true about the theatre: for years now Italian criticism and scholarly work has been remarking how a sort of golden triangle exists between Ravenna, Cesena and Rimini which seems to produce the most beautiful, most innovative, most interesting work at least since the Teatri 90 generation onwards¹⁹⁴, not to mention the literary currents which have been engendered in the region in the past thirty or so years. It’s necessary then to think about this region in particular, and the idea of the Italian *provincia* more generally, as complexly and thoughtfully as possible, to be mindful of the atmospheres and the states of mind of the *provincia*. It’s necessary to be not merely astounded by, or complimentary of, the work it produces but to understand that the work is rendered even more significant, rich, dense by the fact of its provenance. City-folk are easy to wow with work that ‘comes from nowhere’: but that’s never true, is it? Work always comes from *somewhere*.

That somewhere, of course, is made up of many different entities, and like all places it

¹⁹⁴ Some examples are Motus (Rimini), Fanny and Alexander (Ravenna), Valdoca (Cesena), Societas Raffaello Sanzio (Cesena), Teatro delle Albe (Ravenna), Masque (Forlì/Imperia). To name but a few.

is made up of all the intersections between different entities which, for reasons more or less fortuitous, combine in ways that are more or less fortunate or inspired. As Guido Piovene remarked in his 1957 classic travelogue *Viaggio in Italia*, ‘Italy changes kilometre by kilometre, not only in the landscape, but in the quality of the souls’¹⁹⁵. That somewhere is often not the city: in a sense though, it is the place where the city is harboured, where the city is invented and prepared. This shouldn’t come as a surprise: after all, most Italians live *in provincia*, and if not *in provincia* exactly, then at least in the hinterland of larger cities, in the millions of square kilometres that make up the ‘belts’ between cities and countryside, peripheries whose confines are more and more difficult to sketch out. The entity of *la provincia* plays an important part in how Italy regards itself, in how the Neo Spectacularity saw itself and also in how today’s Italian companies view themselves – I think back to an old interview with Silvia Calderoni from the Rimini theatre company Motus, in which she described herself as forever on the margins because she makes theatre, because she’s gay, because she lives *in provincia*. These margins, though, although they are margins and they are *marginal* (for example there isn’t a provincia which exercises, not even remotely, the kind of political pressure and public interest that certain ‘home counties’ have in the UK: decisions in Italy are made in cities, the provincia ‘makes do’), are still the most populated areas in

¹⁹⁵ Piovene, Guidi. *Viaggio in Italia*. Milan: Baldini e Castoldi 2003 (1957). This classic Italian travelogue will supply our last halt at a panorama later in this thesis.

Italy: they are margins that *should be* the centre¹⁹⁶.

Instead, the script of the provincia, including the Romagna region (made more brilliant and more complex by being the place, and cultural locus, of summer holidays and nightlife *par excellence* since Benito Mussolini decided it would be that way, similarly to how the Spanish Costa del Sol was dreamt up by Franco) is not the script of mainstream appetites, the script of central interests, the script of members of society exercising a central political, social, and cultural role. The script is firmly a peripheral one, subjugated to the city and generally disconnected from the city, with regard to which it can only prove secondary or inferior. But as the provincia plays out this script of secondariness in Italian media and ‘official’ debate as a whole, often acting out a role of places ‘left behind’ (by transport, by funding, by the way culture travels and is organised), it doesn’t engage itself solely in piadine and wonderful theatre festivals. The provinces are and were, essentially, places where there is nothing to do: you have to invent it. They thus become the loci not only of secondary appetites in order of ‘official’ nationwide importance, but also of secondary appetites in the language of the subcultural: *in provincia*, away from the maddening crowds, a certain kind of imagination can take hold and produce. *In provincia*, by necessity which becomes virtue,

¹⁹⁶ The urbanist Cristina Bianchetti’s work is particularly long sighted and beautiful, and helpful in my work here. She has reiterated the point of the provinces on a number of occasions, in the context of her research into the entity of the periphery, housing and building planning, notably in *La Questione Abitativa. Processi Politici e Attività Rappresentative* (Franco Angeli, 1985), *Abitare la Città Contemporanea* (Skira, 2003), and especially in the article ‘Il Centro Copia la Periferia’ (2002), published in *Indice dei Libri del Mese*, no. 7/8, 39 in which she mentions that 75% of the Italian population, as of 2002, lived ‘in provincia’ and that, as such, the debate on the phenomenon is still incredibly small compared to the vastness of the phenomenon itself. Bianchetti is also the author of a series of illuminating (and luminous) articles on the Adriatic town, which I mention because, although not quoted, they appear in the background of my thinking here for how they have carefully threaded the study of how towns are planned and the study of how spaces speak aesthetically and in imagination: ‘La città medio-adriatica’ in *Meridiana*, 2002, Vol. 45, pp. 55 to 68, and ‘Così la città adriatica diventa banale’, on *Il Giornale dell’Architettura*, 2003, Vol. 5, pp. 29 to 39 (with Carlo Pozzi).

imagination pushes harder, aided by the fact that time is longer. A fascination can last as purely fascination, unfronted by its reification in the real: an idea, harboured in a relative solitude, in a relative silence, can grow deeper and more serious, shielded from fashion, from the talk of the town, from the opinions of the critics. In the *provincia* it's easier to lie low, to do things in secret – 'the walk at 7 p.m. down the main street is almost an adventure'¹⁹⁷.

Tondelli, who came from provincial Romagna himself and deeply understood the provinces as cultural loci of longing, Tondelli who would also lead a very worldly and metropolitan life, called these villages, these 'fractions', these 'borghi', these tentacular strips of urban fade-out *province oscure*, the 'dark provinces'. The *provincia oscura* mattered to Tondelli, whose gaze resonates profoundly with the gaze of this investigation, because of its surprising, yet deeply rooted, creative force; in various iterations in his *Un Weekend Postmoderno* he describes scenes in which he had felt the hidden vitality of these places: he writes of a gas station outside Modena at 3 a.m., when the city and its periphery are silent and sleepy and all the bars are closed, unexpectedly filling up with youngsters talking, drinking, playing music, dancing¹⁹⁸. He chronicles the short-lived success of a punk band from Macerata called Gangway, whose music is 'a chain of intensity which spreads like wildfire from village to village, with the strength of a revolutionary cry'¹⁹⁹ after their debut in the village piazza with the battle-cry 'PUNK AGAINST NOIA!!!'²⁰⁰. He recounts in detail a party in Friuli, near the village of Cussignacco, in a small warehouse 'typical of this area of

¹⁹⁷ This is Silvio D'Arzo from an interview with Pier Vittorio Tondelli, published in *Un Weekend Postmoderno: Cronache dagli Anni Ottanta*. Milan: Bompiani, 2001. p. 593

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 584

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 289

²⁰⁰ Noia: 'boredom'

small industry and artisanship (...) in what here, like in any Italian periphery, will soon be called “industrial zone” with good music and cheap beer (my beloved provincia never lets me down, it keeps intact its habits and attitudes albeit the times, which are changing)²⁰¹. In the book there is also a later chapter on Reggio Emilia, of which Tondelli in 1990 for the first time, after Piovene, appreciates the ‘colours of the peasantry’ after admitting that for years he had seen it as just a moment on the Via Emilia, ‘huge, scintillating city of the night, with its *balere* on the hills, its maxi-discos in reinforced concrete (...) cathedrals in the middle of the dark plain countryside’²⁰².

Tondelli writes all of the above in his present, not in a looking back – these are not nostalgic depictions, they are tender observations in Tondelli’s own contemporary; and Tondelli knows very well that what is most important about these evenings he so lovingly describes is that they sparkle amongst a blackness, within an *oscurità*. He knows these evenings (and those who make them) are, like the discos he describes, scintillating cathedrals in the dark plain countryside. Elsewhere, Tondelli writes: ‘there is a form of dark attachment to one’s own soil, and then there’s the fog, which transforms the streets and the squares of the village into the metaphysical backstage of an imaginary theatre where the script of the province is played out: the script of the *dream* and the *wait*’²⁰³.

The work, of any kind, produced by the script of the dream and the wait has a quality which is radically different from the work of the here and the now: it banks on the imaginary, things become things that they are not. Which is why the entity of the provincia, apart from

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 291

²⁰² Ibid. p. 575

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 593. Emphasis my own.

producing a great deal of the work which became known as metropolitan, is an important muscle in the machinery of the metropolitan imagination, and why we would miss a whole portion of the picture if we thought the metropolitan as divorced from what lies outside the city. It has a transformative power which plays out in space, away from its space. It creates, as Tondelli so luminously points out, dramatic situations which are deeply bound to their space and which nonetheless evade their space; it looks beyond itself, swallowing suggestions from elsewhere, metabolising the currents it comes into contact with – which then are spread abroad, sometimes indeed ‘like a revolutionary cry’. A band at a local festival, a record heard in a local club, a stranger on holiday met one evening, a radio station heard on long wave, such as the legendary Radio Tirana²⁰⁴: these things, for there are fewer things, last longer *in provincia* – a certain kind of time is afforded, the time to ride a wave. We should keep the *provincia* and its mentality, both closed and fantastically hungry, in the back of our thinking for the metropolitan spectacular; we could even, maybe, extend that mentality to the large Italian cities, vis-à-vis the ‘imagined metropolis’. And we could imagine provinces, as

²⁰⁴ Radio Tirana: I refer to the letter published by Raffaello Sanzio in the 1986 Patalogo and published, translated, in Joe Kelleher and Nick Ridout’s introduction to *The Theatre of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge 2007 at p. 9. The letter is magnificent, as are a couple of Pier Vittorio Tondelli’s own odes to Radio Tirana in *Un Weekend Postmoderno* and in *Lettere agli Amici*. The fact that Radio Tirana was so audible on the Adriatic Riviera is important in this discussion, and it is particularly interesting because it is a double-edged sword: it was, and is (now nostalgically) beloved because of the news of an other world it brought, and because it was such a classic for people who spent the summer in Romagna (again, let’s note that these groups, including Sanzio were there also in winter). Its news was in such stark contrast to the pleasures of the Adriatic summer. Searching for archival recordings, you can find news items of things like number of children born in such hospital, record of potatoes produced in such province, birthday of the secretary of state etc etc. But this was not and is not a joke (although all too often these days the idea of Communism provokes hilarity); especially not in the context of a ‘red’ region, which perhaps truly did (perhaps even still does?) wish itself non-aligned with its fellow Italian citizens. Furthermore, there’s a kind of brutality to Radio Tirana: a kind of rigour, a kind of strictness, which the Italian listener was perfectly able to be critical of, but which nonetheless exercises a certain fascination.

collections of provincial towns, as *diffused* metropolises themselves²⁰⁵, in which interconnected pockets of light and darkness, complex networks of lives, imaginary and physically perceived environments give rise to a coagulated centre-less megalopolis, one which is constantly pulling at the threads separating urban living from *campanilista*²⁰⁶ mentality, a sense of public life from a sense of ‘dark’ living. Silvio D’Arzo’s short story *Casa D’Altri*, adored and analysed by Tondelli in his discussions on provinces in *Un Weekend Postmoderno*, contains a passage in which the narrator describes the seven houses and the ‘courtyard they call piazza’ of the tiny Montefelice, in the Emilian Apennine; standing above the *borgo*, in the mountains, he declares: ‘this is all of Montefelice – all of it, and nobody knows’²⁰⁷.

I opened this short excursus with a sentence from a record which, for Italian punk and post punk, was important to the point of legendary: it was the first by a group of bands and musicians (and video and theatre makers as a larger, wider collective) from Pordenone, in Friuli, who used to call themselves ‘the great complotto’, the great conspiracy. In a time of proliferation of journalistic clichés based on comparisons, ‘Rome like New York’²⁰⁸, ‘Rimini

²⁰⁵ This is especially true of the Adriatic Riviera; Tondelli describes it in a fragment published by Fulvio Panzeri in *Riccione e la Riviera Vent’anni Dopo*. Rimini: Guaraldi Editore, 2005. p. 69. The Adriatic club scene, in its varied historical, sociological and aesthetic manifestations has been recently and excellently detailed in Pacoda, Pierfrancesco. *Riviera Club Culture: la Scena Dance nella Metropoli Balneare*. Rimini: NdA, 2012. Pacoda also draws out the resonances, and common ground, between the club and the theatre scene.

²⁰⁶ Campanilista is a term derived from *campanile*, ‘belltower’, and denotes a local mentality faithful only to one’s own belltower.

²⁰⁷ D’Arzo, Silvio. *Casa d’altri e altri racconti*. Einaudi, 1980

²⁰⁸ I’m thinking here of an interview with Giuseppe Bartolucci by Titti Denise Caravella entitled ‘Roma come New York’ and published in ‘Sipario’ 449, October 1985, pp. 42 - 43

like Hollywood'²⁰⁹, the 'Via Emilia like the Wild West'²¹⁰ – sparkling mouthfuls of a euphoric xenophilia, playful fragments of a mediatic mood, a moment, a self-imagination – the comparison between Pordenone and London also took place, crafted to be made stranger, and more humorous, by the abyss of renown separating the two cities. The sentence was used widely in music journalism, and is still remembered today; *Mister Fantasy*, a music programme which aired on national TV, dedicated a special to this enthused, wildly creative scene with that sort of tagline: *Pordenone like London! Capital of punk!* Of course the thinking behind the very marketing gesture was that it was absolutely ridiculous – which is why that strap-line strikes me as particularly significant: *Pordenone can be London, but London can never be Pordenone*. Of course Pordenone can't be London, but the message is very clear: the province, whose fuel, whose vital lymph is the dream and the wait, can imaginarily transform itself into anything, anyone, anywhere. London, which can't dream and wait for it must act, because everybody's looking, has to be London. It has to be London because, unlike the case of D'Arzo's Montefelice, *everyone* knows. The centre can't out-centre itself; but the crepuscular *provincia*, on its imaginary stage, can imagine itself into being.

²⁰⁹ Tondelli, amongst others, titles the section about the Adriatic in *Un Weekend Postmoderno* 'Rimini come Hollywood'. There are also a couple of reviews for Magazzini Criminali's aforementioned *Blitz* which use the comparison: M. G. De Gregori, 'Tra Luna Park e Goldrake Rimini sembra Hollywood' (L'Unita, 3/7/1980) and G. Manzella, 'Sette UFO Armati calano sul pianeta spiaggia: sognando California il Carrozone assale Rimini' (Il Manifesto, 4/7/1980), and countless other 'bits and pieces' (films, advertising, etc.)

²¹⁰ This comparison is an ongoing cliché, and most probably starts with singer-songwriter Francesco Guccini's 1984 album *Fra la Via Emilia e il West*.

Two Panoramas

#1: 'In the night I told you about, we had dinner in Paderno, and then in the moonless darkness we made our way up towards Pieve del Pino, and we saw an immense quantity of fireflies, which made little forests of fire amongst the little forests of shrubs, and we envied them because they loved each other, they looked for each other with amorous flights and lights, while we were all arid, all male and in artificial vagrancy. And so I thought about how beautiful friendship is, and of the groups of young 20 somethings (...) filling the night with their cries. (...). And we were like that, that night; we kept finding our way up the hillsides, amongst the brittle twigs which were dry, dead, and their death seemed alive; we traversed orchards and trees heavy with black cherries, and reached the top of another hill. From there you could clearly see two very distant yet ferocious headlights, mechanical eyes from which it is impossible to escape, and then a terror of being discovered took hold of us, as dogs barked and we felt guilty, and we ran down the back, down the peaks of the hill. (...) At the first signs of light we drank the last drop from our bottles of wine. The sun was a green pearl. I stripped off my clothes and danced in honour of the light – I was all white...' ²¹¹

•

²¹¹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo. Letter to Franco Farolfi, written on the night between 31st January and 1st February 1941. *The Letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini vol. I*, trans. Stuart Wood. London: Quartet, 1992. p. 123. I have altered the translation.

#2: ‘We arrived at a small bend in the road. All of a sudden the sky, of a deep night blue, opened up on the vision of the riviera with the luminous stripes of the cars, the headlights, the neon signs from the hotels, no longer distinguishable if not as confused bright flashes. And the cities, the cities with their perfectly touristic names – Bellariva, Marebello, Miramare, Rivazzurra – appeared as a long inextinguishable luminous heating coil, caressing the black of the sea like strass on the neckline of an evening dress. Because if on the one side all of the nightlife shone in the heat of the summer fervour, on the other, all that existed was the darkness, the deep, the unknown; and that road which for kilometres and kilometres followed the Adriatic offering parties, happiness and fun, that road I had only one expression for, *in the spotlight*, that very stripe of pleasure marked the boundary between life and its dream, the frontier between the sparkling illusions of fun and the opaque weight of reality. (...) If someone had travelled the whole of that road, the whole length of it, without ever coming off it, maybe they would have really lived the dream. At the condition of never veering one way or the other. After all, as Susy had said earlier, the trick was minor, and mundane. “You just have to believe it”, she had said. (...) It worked. Even I had become a prisoner of it. Believing it was irresistible to me.’²¹²

²¹² Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Rimini*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985. p. 43

Towards the Banal: Pasolini, Mendini, and the fireflies²¹³

It's 1974, and Pasolini is being filmed by a RAI troupe for a documentary entitled *Pasolini e la Forma della Città*, 'Pasolini and the Shape of the City'²¹⁴. The film follows Pasolini, with his camera, in the towns of Orte and Sabaudia, both in Latium. Orte is what Pasolini calls a 'perfect medieval borgo', rising on a hill and fortified all around, with a clear design of what is *intra-muros* and *extra-muros*. On the edge of the town, a series of council blocks have risen, together with another few new structures in reinforced concrete – and Pasolini despairs at what has been done to *the shape of the city*. He laments that the shape of Orte was perfect; that he understands the need for social housing but that it should have been built elsewhere; that the architectural aberration is in the lack of proportionality, the odd placement, the refusal of these buildings to enter a dialogue, to organically interact with the brown-blue mist of the countryside. Pasolini remarks that, in practical terms, this attitude to building up the peripheries of towns like Orte not only in Italy, but everywhere in the developed and undeveloped world, makes it impossible to shoot historical films, to imagine space *as it was*. And he stresses that what he wants to defend is not the work of great masters, of great individuals, the *palazzi* or the churches, but the work of what he calls 'the popular anonymous': cobbled streets, medieval tunnels – the *shape* of the city, for Pasolini, is given not by an author, but by an anonymous collectivity; and that is what, for Pasolini, is so endangered by modern architectural speculation.

²¹³ A lyric to hang over this chapter: *Cartagine nel mare non c'è più / Nel tempo è sparita perché l'hai voluto tu // Carthage is no longer in the sea / Over time it disappeared because you wanted it to*". Mimmo del Giacco, *Un Panorama / Recensione*. Naples: Slinger Records, year unknown (probably 1985). Homemade: Slinger Records never existed. On the cover, photos of Del Giacco sitting in front of a map of Tunisia hanging on the wall. Gems from the archive.

²¹⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini / RAI. *Pasolini e la Forma della Città*, 1974

In the second part of the documentary Pasolini is in Sabaudia, a town built as part of Mussolini's reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, South of Rome. This city appears to Pasolini as a sort of triumph: testimony to the fact that twenty years of fascism and of the aesthetics and propaganda of 'a group of criminals in power'²¹⁵ did nothing to affect the shape of the provincial Italian city and its traditions because Sabaudia, in spite of its rationalistic, academic, fascist architecture is *not* the product of fascism, but the product of rustic, popular, provincial Italy. 'Now', he continues, 'the opposite happens. The power of consumerist society *takes away reality* from the various modes of being of people, which Italy has produced in an extremely diversified way. And it happened so fast, in the past four, five, or maybe seven, maybe ten years, that we didn't even realise. Now we look around as if waking from a dream and realise that Italy has been destroyed, and that maybe it's too late'²¹⁶. Pasolini walks away from the camera.

A reassurance: I have no intention of arguing with Pasolini. Nevertheless, I do want to understand Pasolini's reasoning with respect to other, later attitudes. As with the two panoramas I juxtaposed a page back, I want to understand these ideas beside each other, trace the evolution in thinking a *reality* (in this case, the reality of the changing city, for better or for worse – probably for worse). The distinction between old fascism and new fascism put in place by Pasolini in this documentary and in many other works is a generative and precious one – and it is present in so much of the thinking of those whose work I am summoning here. Pasolini's work keeps doing and undoing throughout the 1970s and 1980s: Pasolini's work is

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

still, again, doing and undoing²¹⁷. Yet this panorama which changes so fast that ‘we didn’t even realise’ obliges us to also look at what Pasolini didn’t see, couldn’t see or chose not to see, and handle the fact that all along we will tread on delicate political ground. We will have to deal with the fact we may condone certain perspectives which would be abhorrent from Pasolini’s point of view, but that we do this because part of our remit here is to understand other ways of being political, and indeed of being political beyond a *destroyed Italy*, beyond the *too late*. Our position here is also that of those who are still (then) and still (now) dancing – Pasolini has left us, in fact even Tondelli has left us, but we are still here.

From this stance, the juxtaposition of those two hilltop panoramas; from this stance, I also remind the reader of Tondelli’s descriptions of the Via Emilia, so radically distant from Pasolini’s descriptions of those same areas, that same coastline, in his travels of the summer of 1959 now edited as *La Lunga Rotta di Sabbia* (‘The Long Route of Sand’)²¹⁸. Italy had changed, has changed, changes, yes – faster than anyone could imagine, yes. But the gaze changes also, has to change in order to *survive*. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of seeing those two panoramas side by side is precisely that they offer an opening into understanding how a political kind of movement can take place and shape, into tracing the genesis of a resistance but also into intercepting, perhaps, the imperfections of a sort of political panic.

One of the discursive strings pulled at by Georges Didi-Huberman in his study of

²¹⁷ An interesting recent look at how Pasolini’s heredity is still completely problematic and *troubling* is offered in Antonello, Pierpaolo. *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea*. Milan: Mimesis, 2013.

²¹⁸ Pasolini, Pier Paolo, *La Lunga Strada di Sabbia* (reportage for the magazine ‘Successo’ in July, August, September 1959) and edited by Séclier, Philippe, *La lunga strada di sabbia*. Photographs by Philippe Séclier; text and manuscript edited by Graziella Chiarcossi; transcription by Giona Tuccini. Rome: Contrasto Due, 2005.

survivances based on Pasolini's *Letter of the Fireflies*²¹⁹ regards precisely a question of motion, that is, a question of intermittence. Didi-Huberman frames the letter by stressing the basis for Pasolini's argument, his knowledge of the fireflies, the fact of his having witnessed them: in this regard, he quotes the important (and often forgotten, in the conversation about Pasolini's fireflies) letter to Franco Farolfi from February 1st 1941 (the Panorama #1 above), locates it within Pasolini's rediscovery of Dante, draws lines between Pasolini's initial vision of the fireflies and the metaphor, both erotic and political (and profoundly both) of the delicate vespertine light of the insects ephemerally illuminating his *dark forest* 'between euphoria and the prey, between pleasure and guilt, between dreams and despair'²²⁰. In the second chapter of his book, Didi-Huberman considers a book by Denis Roche, *La Disparition des Lucioles*, and the correspondences singled out by Roche between Barthes' *La Chambre Claire* and his own act, as a photographer, of photographing the fireflies. Roche admonishes Barthes for having omitted, in his celebrated study of photography, everything that photography is capable of in terms of style, in terms of freedom, and in terms of intermittence²²¹. Didi-Huberman writes: 'at a first glance, this notion of *intermittence* appears surprising (...). The truth is that it's fundamental. How can we not think, in this case, about the "discontinuous", jumping, character of the dialectical image according to Walter Benjamin, a notion destined precisely to make us comprehend how *times become visible*, how history itself appears to us in a "flash" which we have to call an "image"?'²²².

²¹⁹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 'Il Vuoto del Potere' ovvero 'L'Articolo delle Lucciole'. *Corriere della Sera*, 1st February 1975.

²²⁰ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010. p. 15

²²¹ Ibid. p. 17

²²² Ibid. p. 18

Roche, whose book dates from 1982, halts halfway to describe a night in 1981 in an Italian village, during which to his utmost surprise he sees them, those he was no longer hoping for. Then they disappear: ‘re-disappearance of the fireflies’²²³. Didi-Huberman continues by describing his own firefly moment, in Rome, in the mid 1980s, ten years after Pasolini’s letter (and also after Pasolini’s death). Here he observes that the forest in which he had seen them had been cut down by the time of his writing, in the late 2000s: gone again.

There are probably good reasons to be pessimistic regarding the future of the Roman fireflies. As I write, Silvio Berlusconi continues to show off under the spotlights, the Northern League moves efficiently and the Roma are being put on record – which is a good system to get rid of them. There are all the reasons to be pessimistic, but that is exactly why it’s necessary to open our eyes in the night, to keep moving, to keep searching for the fireflies.²²⁴

Personally, I saw fireflies for the second time in 2008: a small group of them, in August, when I would have expected them to stay away from the many lights in the villas which, in Summer, light the hills behind the beach town where I saw them, while Berlusconi showed off under the spotlights. I saw them in a place which used to be quite secluded (when we first moved there it counted 35 inhabitants) and in which, especially in August, a few small but painful torches of *Berlusconismo* have begun to appear: a sort of disco-trampoline from which you can hear the music at night; a pay-per-hour parking lot; a trendy *aperitivo* bar, a luxurious guesthouse and a non-luxurious hotel. The priest, who had always said mass in a field outside the church on Sunday nights, still says mass outdoors, but with a microphone.

What Pasolini said about Orte and Sabaudia was true: a kind of true which was

²²³ Ibid. p. 19

²²⁴ Ibid. p. 31

infinitesimally small compared to how true it is now. Berlusconi has dominated Italian politics and society since I began this investigation, since I began any investigation, since I had barely learned to read and write (I remember vividly going to a branch of Standa, Berlusconi's department store, after my first day at elementary school and reading *casa*, 'home', instead of *cassa*, 'till', which in retrospect is perfect since he was turning my country into a company) and although he has come very close to disappearing many times during this investigation, I find that he is still here, that he survives in spite of all, because he is, essentially, *not* a firefly. Therefore what I want to state is this: Berlusconi's continuous survivance can't determine the disappearance of the fireflies – Berlusconi can't stop us from looking, from moving, from keeping our eyes open in the night, and hence he (or 'it', for Berlusconi is a concept, a sort of *grand récit*) also can't stop us from witnessing the fireflies, 'at least once in our lives'²²⁵.

Later in the same chapter, Didi-Huberman wisely observes: 'it would be stupid and criminal to put the fireflies under a spotlight in the hope of being able to better observe them'²²⁶. That is, indeed, what we cannot do: and besides, we don't want to kill them. What we *can* do, is attempt to ignore this all-encompassing light, wear sunglasses to attempt to see beyond, and look for the fireflies *in spite of all* under this enormous spotlight, under the enormous spotlight which after Zygmunt Bauman I will call the *darkness of postmodernity*: a switch in the choice of attitudes and instruments with which to face centrelessness and fragmentation, from a certitude crafted out of the sureness of the best of all possible worlds, to

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 30

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 33

one made out of the certainty of the worst²²⁷.

•

It's the early 1980s, and amongst a series of aphorisms and different scattered notes reassembled by Marisa Galbiati, Alessandro Mendini writes this: 'FOREST – in the sphere of all the possible also the possibility of my life exists. Lost in the “dark forest” I find more invisible things than visible ones. After all this time, I no longer even try to escape to catch sight of some light: this is where my life is'²²⁸. We find it thrown in between a short page about so-called Black Design and a short digression about cafetieres, in a collection of fragments and thoughts in no particular order, a book which could be kept in the bathroom, brandishing on the front cover a review from *Vogue Casa*. We could dismiss it as a nugget of cosmic pessimism of a trendy architect, if we didn't know that it forms part of a complex, attentive socio-architectural system which plugs directly not only into the 'scene' of the New Spectacular theatre (and, quite literally, protrudes onto its stage²²⁹), but also, perhaps unexpectedly, into the debates regarding space, cities, inhabitability, spectacularity, and fireflies which animate these pages.

²²⁷ In a volume containing a debate with Zygmunt Bauman in Novellara (Reggio Emilia), entitled *Il Buio del Postmoderno*, 'The Dark of Postmodernity', published in Italy by Aliberti in 2011, Bauman interrogates his notions of liquidity vis à vis a globalised Europe and vis à vis the space of the countryside versus the space of the city; the city which is no more dark, no more dangerous and no bigger than it was fifty years ago, but according to Bauman, the information its inhabitants tend to search for is often information which confirms and augments an inkling of fear.

²²⁸ Mendini, Alessandro (Ed: Marisa Galbiati). *La Poltrona di Proust: architettura, arte, design e altro*. Milan: Tranchida, 1991. p. 33

²²⁹ Alessandro Mendini designed the following pieces: *Famiglia Horror*, *Un Milione di Domani*, *Vicino Giulietta* (Antonio Syxty); *R Polaroid*, *Zone Calde*, *Ebdomero*, *Crollo Nervoso* (Magazzini).

Why Alessandro Mendini? I feel the need to justify his presence: a designer, known for his colourful furnishings and chaotic interiors, for his zig-zags and his squiggles, for his *pointilliste* armchairs and his Mickey Mouse teapots, forever immortalised in an anthropomorphic corkscrew which bears his name, converses in these pages with Italy's most prominent public intellectual of the 20th Century, the most troubled and the most troubling, the most respected and very probably the most influential. The clear, and less interesting, answer is Alessandro Mendini because he worked on a total of seven Neo-Spectacular performances, never merely as 'designer' but always in a shared project with the artists (with Antonio Syxty and with Magazzini Criminali, to be precise), so it's my historiographical duty to look at his work, Mickey Mouse teapots or not. Beyond the cloud of signification that normally surrounds Mendini, though, lies a theoretical backbone, developed between the late 1970s and early 1980s, which, similarly to Tondelli's but more consciously than Tondelli, refabricates ways of thinking the political, and does so, as is apt for an architect and designer, through thinking spaces and their uses. In addition to this and apart from this, the intention of this study is not to keep discounting the already discounted, but to give serious attention to all of those phenomena which are more easily *discountable* than others: I repeat, Mickey Mouse teapots or not. Mendini, to my knowledge, has never published an official comment to Pasolini's remarks on Orte and Sabaudia, or on fascist fascism versus neo-capitalist fascism, although he produced many writings roused by the same problems. If Mendini *had* responded formally to Pasolini, though, he would have probably questioned two of his assertions: the notion of the anonymous collective existing solely in the ancient (why not in the modern?) and the notion of the round perfection of the city of Orte (why round? And why not dwell in

the imperfection?).

We're in a cultural and historical space, in a 'darkness', in which most if not all the interlocutors I am in conversation with here agree on the radical destruction operated by consumerist society, on its drastically rapid evolution, on the status quo being that something had been lost forever, that something *isn't anymore*. What we don't all necessarily agree on, once again, regards the disappearance of the fireflies: the noise and light pollution wrecking the countryside in Emilia Romagna is given by those very discos which to Tondelli are themselves hubs of fireflies, symbolic of a kind of happy-go-lucky *resistance*. I insist again, then, on an idea of a relocation of the political and of a possible political strategy the way, some pages back, I argued that it is not that the idea of clandestinity *disappears* but that it shifts, from underground into overground (and fireflies are a perfect example of this, 'clandestine societies' as Didi-Huberman also calls them, and mentions the Roma community). My sense is that, in order to understand the conceptual muscularity of the New Spectacularity, we will have to take seriously a sentence by Silvana Sinisi à propos the work which has haunted this investigation from its beginnings, in which Sinisi states that this theatre was 'taking revenge in the aesthetic as a strategy of dissensus'²³⁰.

This action of taking revenge in the aesthetic is to be seen in more than one way. We can (and also should, I think) keep in mind the idea of a certain *desperation*, of a certain political post-apocalyptic kind of hopeless *suffering* (in the aesthetic because there is nowhere else / revenge as last resort). But we should also re-animate this idea from the other side: again Didi-Huberman, quoting Jean-Paul Curnier's meditations on Pasolini's fireflies, writes that

²³⁰ Sinisi, Silvana. 'Neoavanguardia e postavanguardia in Italia' in *Avanguardie ed Utopie del Teatro, Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo Vol. 20*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001. p. 717

‘the question of the fireflies is supposedly, first and foremost, a political and historical question. Jean-Paul Curnier, who hasn’t failed to mention the letter of 1941, sustains rightly in an article about Pasolinian politics that the innocent beauty of the boys in Bologna doesn’t at all denote “a simple question of aesthetics and of poetic form, because the stakes it raises are fundamental. Its role is to free political thought from its discursive excess” and to, hence, reach that crucial place in which politics are incarnated in each individual’s body, gestures, desires’²³¹. A sort of ping-pong of reifications, aesthetics into body into politics, a game which performance knows well and which I have almost taken for granted as the basis for this investigation – but here these players are reified once again, de-carnated once more, in a process whereby bodies, gestures, desires fuse into the environment, the dripping of the scenery, the bodies which become clothing, Perniolian *exteriority that feels*, the diffused metropolis, the mood, the atmosphere: disappearance, reappearance. Intermittence. Chromakey unplugged and then plugged in again.

•

In 1974, in the year, that is, in which Pasolini filmed the aforementioned documentary, Mendini went to a cave near Genoa with a piece of furniture of his, a chair mounted on top of a small set of stairs entitled *Monumentino da Casa* (‘Small Monument for the Home’) and set fire to it. The destruction of the *monumentino* has long been seen as a dramatic gesture signalling the end of the modernist project and hence as a sort of inauguration of

²³¹ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010. p. 18

postmodernism – a baptism of fire in which the monumental is destroyed, a monumental which monumentalises its owner, the person who sits on the chair, as an allegory for the destruction of a unitary point of view, as well as for a perfectly staged death of the author. Mendini's own description speaks of wanting to produce a change of state, 'from object to relic'²³². This is interesting: the thing moves from existing in the real to existing in representation and from thing in the present to remnant of the past; it does so through fire, by way of dramatic action, by way, effectively, of performance and of performance *through fire*. The documentation was published in the pages of the architecture review *Casabella*, which Mendini directed at the time, and the case was closed: after the bonfire, a darkness begins. From this moment on, Mendini and his collaborators at Studio Alchimia in Milan (notably Paola Navone, Daniela Puppa and Franco Raggi) by and large abandoned the idea of design (the very idea of the 'project' is considered hierarchic, academic, modernist, intellectualist) and concentrated instead on undesigning, redesigning, replicating what they termed 'the banal'²³³.

Although existing in the physical cultural sphere of what Pasolini would have called 'masters' (going back to the city of Orte), that is in what was undoubtedly an élite of architects, the project of the banal has at its heart the *relocation* of the dominion over space, the relocation of how space is structured and how space matters. The project of the banal also contains a relocation of *who* structures space and for *whom* space matters, and moves this power from the sphere of the 'masters' to the sphere of precisely that anonymous popular

²³² Mendini, Alessandro in *Casabella*, July 1974.

²³³ The word 'banal' was used by Alchimia on a number of occasions: its first usage was in an exhibition entitled 'La Stanza Banale' ('The Banal Room') in 1979, a room inhabited by Magazzini Criminali.

which Pasolini saw as the noble constructor of the city of Orte – the same anonymous popular, but six or seven-hundred years later (six or seven-hundred years too late?). Mendini and his collaborators are acutely aware that it is not the architectural masters who were building the world by the 1970s (and I ask, had they ever?), it is the ‘projects without project’ which truly define the way an era looks:

The compact nuclei of Italian historical centres are counteracted in real terms by areas of urban expansion which are almost always chaotic and which almost always lack a projectual order. A heterogeneous and fragmentary band which isn’t city and isn’t countryside: it’s the periphery, the architectural phenomenon which truly defines our era (...). The term ‘postmodernism’ as used in architecture attempts to impose a critical order onto these phenomena, but once again its use refers to a cultured project, and performs an a posteriori classification. What it doesn’t do is remove the ideological misunderstandings regarding the project: the architect and the designer keep elaborating new styles, completely ignoring the parallel mass creative processes which truly act on the lived environment.²³⁴

For Mendini, this doesn’t mean that the architects should disinvolve themselves, and leave well enough (or bad enough) alone. What it means is that an acceptance should take place, and on the basis of this acceptance a relocation of bodies, of gestures, of desires. It’s the ‘from above’ motion of architecture that Mendini wants to undo, and substitute it with a collaboration that takes effect as an understanding not of the fact that ‘the public has bad taste’ but of what that taste (good or bad is irrelevant) is: how it works, where it comes from, what desires it speaks to. He proposes not simply to observe the banal, but to fall in love with the

²³⁴ Raggi, Franco, in Mendini, Alessandro et al. *Elogio del Banale* (ed. Radice, Barbara). Milan: Studio Forma, 1980. pp. 23 e 24

way the banal thinks and acts – although this move too is laced with a certain desperation (because all of these acts of falling in love are laced with ‘althoughs’, the melancholy and irresolvable althoughs of loss). Italy has changed, faster than we could ever imagine; something has been lost forever and now we awake, as if from a dream, and we realise it’s too late. What has been lost, according to Mendini (and, clearly, not only to Mendini) is the consciousness of the proletariat – and with that, the shape of the city, a range of utopian ideals, the vectorial thrust of history, the need for progressive politics, the provincial town in its round perfection, ‘good taste’ and the identity of the popular.

The enterprise of the banal involves an acting not *upon* but *within* the temporal expanse of the ‘too late’. That it’s dark is a given, so the result will inevitably be ‘unhappy’. This unhappy is a strange variety of unhappy – it is, first and foremost, a form of resistance: a resistance with full consciousness of a certain hopelessness; and within this hopelessness (which resists in the ‘in spite of’), attempts to make space for a little joy, or if not joy then at least a little fun. In a mechanism similar to that of Tondelli’s kids at the gas station after everything had closed, in a spirit akin to mine as I proposed, some pages back, to not let Berlusconi rid us of an openness to the fireflies, with a force similar to that contained in Didi-Huberman’s assertion that ‘if the image is a temporal operator of survivances – which brings, as such, (...) a political force relative to our past and to our future – then we will have to better understand its movement of falling towards us, that fall or that “decline”, or even that declination, which is not disappearance, in spite of what Pasolini feared in 1975’²³⁵, Mendini’s operation also, in attunement with the operations of the New Spectacular, is based

²³⁵ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010. p. 71

in what Dick Hebdige, with the somberly lean choice of words encountered earlier, has termed ‘making do with the nonetheless’: ‘we’ll have to lighten up a little – learn how to dance in the dark’²³⁶.

Thanks to current manipulations and consequential annihilations of conflict, the awareness of being exploited has left space to a polite acceptance which diffuses indifference and apathy. What has disappeared is the necessity of a sublimation which may be capable of dreaming, and the consequent desublimation has created ‘the happy consciousness’ (...). After the death of the revolutionary proletariat, the word ‘revolution’ is consigned to a fringe of outcasts for whom two routes are possible: the paradise of drugs, or armed subversion. There is a third route, but it’s the hardest: the pursuit of an ‘unhappy consciousness’, that is the critical and cynical acceptance of the everyday banal.²³⁷

It is crucial to notice, with respect to the theories of survivances I have been describing here, that just as Didi-Huberman points out that a decline is not necessarily a disappearance, a survival (or a will to survive) is not necessarily a progressive affair either. Mendini’s writings speak very clearly of consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses, and the question of sublimation and desublimation is intimately connected to a question of class, and from class to a question of ideals, desires, ambitions, and hence of architecture: there is an edge, like the edge of the city, in Mendini’s theory, and it is an edge like the edge of the world, we can imagine it as ‘empty’. It is a space (perhaps it is the street, the *piazza* as both physical and ideological space) that has been *deserted* by those who used to populate it (the proletariat): so it isn’t that

²³⁶ Hebdige, Dick. *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. London: Routledge, 2006. p. 237 to 239

²³⁷ Mendini, Alessandro. *Per un’Architettura Banale*. Unpublished text, 30th October 1979. In the Atelier Mendini archives (ateliermendini.com)

the class is ‘over’ but that the class is ‘empty’²³⁸. It has ‘relocated’ by way of having given up on the idea of *knowing* its exploitation and having decided to ‘politely accept it’, that is, to *ignore* its exploitation in order to pursue a perfectly legitimate interest towards a private right, the right to be *not unhappy*.

Thus, Mendini asserts (in very good company), the proletariat becomes a new *petite bourgeoisie* which elaborates on its new *petit bourgeois* desires, and stops, ostensibly, responding to any other larger ideological or aesthetic superstructure: here, a series of photographs taken by Mendini and his collaborators illuminate the point, showing ‘popular solutions’ such as a flowerbed in the shape of a star in Rimini; a gold and royal blue marble doorway in Pescara; the triangle shaped interior of a local church near Trapani²³⁹. Together with these ‘solutions’, Mendini studies domestic interiors, notably living rooms and bedrooms, which are the most interesting to him insofar as they are the spaces where desires are not only harboured, but also lived out, indulged, enjoyed. He publishes photographs of apartments belonging to ‘a factory worker in Padua’, ‘an office clerk in Pescara’, and so on²⁴⁰. To envisage these rooms, the reader might want to recall the ending of Elio Petri’s 1971 film *The Working Classes go to Heaven*, in which the extenuated Lulù Massa (the surname ‘Massa’ is a perfect ‘speaking name’), having lost his dignity both with the trade union and with his wife Lidia, has a nervous breakdown in which he maniacally goes through every

²³⁸ Here I am spatialising a temporal question, and I am doing so after Berlant: Berlant speaks of ‘stretched out present’, I have spoken here of ‘the expanse of the too late’; the class as ‘empty’ rather than as ‘ended’ seems to me to lend valuable perspectives.

²³⁹ All the photographs I am referring to are catalogued and published in *Elogio del Banale* (ed. Radice, Barbara). Milan: Studio Forma, 1980.

²⁴⁰ I invite my reader to recall a passage, in part I of this thesis, on the subject of venetian blinds. I am referring again to that sphere of effects that regards a certain ‘democratisation of scenography’; I am referring again to venetian blinds in our penthouses and especially, much more crucially, not in our penthouses: maybe at the factory worker’s in Padua, at the office clerk’s in Pescara, and so on.

object in the house and declares its *cost*. Having listened to salaries throughout the film, we become acutely aware of the disconnection between the cost of these objects and their *value*: although the link is never formally stated in Massa's script, we realise that an inflatable Donald Duck took about 10 hours of work to buy. The wife who has abandoned him, Lidia, is a hairdresser (it is significant that she works with *beauty*), and she doesn't want 'that life' anymore. She wants to imagine herself as *petit bourgeois* and rid herself of her husband's fantasy-murdering problems and presence; she, in turn, murders her husband's sexual fantasies, with her fake face, fake hair, fake breasts²⁴¹.

This new, and perhaps in some of its turns particularly Italian, form of *petite bourgeoisie* is well-trodden ground: Pasolini had already accused the proletariat of becoming *petit bourgeois* as victims of 'the second industrial revolution, which in Italy is the first: consumerism (...) which has transformed the Italian proletariat into *piccoli borghesi*²⁴², devoured mostly by the very financial anxiety of being *piccoli borghesi* in the first place. It is the same *petit* and *petty bourgeoisie* which, fifteen to twenty years later, Agamben will describe as 'planetary', the 'PPB' which 'nullif[ies] all that exists with the same gesture with which [it] seems obstinately to adhere to it: [it] knows only the inauthentic and even refuses the idea of a discourse that could be proper to [it]. (...) In the petty bourgeoisie, the diversities that have marked the tragicomedy of universal history are brought together and exposed in a phantasmagorical vacuousness'²⁴³.

²⁴¹ Massa accuses Lidia of being 'fake' after the couple's argument in front of the television, about halfway through the film; the argument scene in itself is interesting, the kitchen so dark and the TV so shiny.

²⁴² Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 'Due modeste proposte per eliminare la criminalità in Italia'. *Corriere della Sera* 18th October 1975

²⁴³ Agamben, Giorgio. *La comunità che viene* (1990). Trans. Michael Hardt as *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. pp. 63, 64.

•

Perhaps as a condition of the historical moment he is writing in, though, Mendini has a clear sense that whatever we decide to call this ‘class’, it is (at least, I stress, in that specific historical moment) not only a product of consumerism in an even more advanced form of widespread *hedonism*²⁴⁴ (compared to what Pasolini saw in the ‘70s and of course to what Marx described at *petite bourgeoisie* in the first place), but also and critically the result of a certain *exhaustion*. *Exhaustion* toward unhappiness – which is not only the unhappiness of ‘not having’ as longing for a material *something* (a grand front door in gold and royal blue marble, for example), but also and especially the unhappiness of ‘not having’ as longing for a *political* something, over and over and over again: the exhaustion of coming close and failing, of living in a continuous *almost*. So instead of watching invisible paint dry, the choice is to stop painting; what happens to those who are left at the edge of the city with a paintbrush in hand? They keep trying, either through armed subversion or through heroin (both are means of re-sublimating what Mendini terms ‘desublimated’). Mendini proposes: no, wait, hang in there. *Be unhappy and stay there*. And if you find the energy, you can temporarily lift your unhappiness by (hopelessly) attempting to entertain yourself, in the meantime, in the nonetheless. Don’t re-sublimate somewhere else, mind; don’t libidinally reinvest into

²⁴⁴ Another widespread journalistic cliché at this time (and still) is the notion of ‘edonismo Craxiano’, the era of hedonism introduced with Craxi’s 1983 victory with his PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano) at the general elections. I note this to make clear how talk of hedonism in the early Italian 1980s is already very loaded: ‘hedonism’ is not a word I choose by chance. Various opinions on Milan formed at this time, as city of fashion, commercials and ‘aperitivi’. The myth of the Milanese aperitif is born here and now, with the slogan ‘Milano da Bere’, initially used in an advertising campaign for an alcoholic beverage, meaning ‘drinkable Milan’ – ‘Milano da Bere’ quickly became used as an expression referring to the ‘aperitif scene’ in Milan, notably the moneyed scene (politicians, models, bankers etc). This is not an expression which has disappeared – the Milano da Bere is still very much alive.

something else: give up on libidinal capital entirely. Lose hope: let your energies just go to waste, like luminescent arrows pointing out of a hoover²⁴⁵.

Mendini's intervention presents itself as, quite sharply it seems to me, occupying a very particular black hole or blind spot on the path (or the motorway) of a certain line of critical thinking, locatable somewhere (a strange somewhere, peripheral, eerie) between the ideas elaborated towards the end of the *autonomia* movement and Lauren Berlant's concept of *cruel optimism*²⁴⁶. Because if cruel optimism, as delineated by Berlant, is the affective mechanism by which, since the 1980s, we (we who? It seems to me that Berlant, in my view rightly and thoughtfully, affords Agamben's apocalyptic PPB a certain innocence²⁴⁷) have been tricked into pursuing a 'good life' (or rather *the* good life, for one size fits all) by insisting on the very strategies, dreams and ideals which play, at the same time, the double role of producing that idea of good life *and* of rendering impossible its attainment, then Mendini's thinking lies absolutely on the same line, and at the same time *on the other side* of this 'trick': we could rename the 'unhappy consciousness' as 'compassionate pessimism', for it seems to play 'the other colour' of the same cruel tournament on Berlant's chessboard.

Mendini proposes we live not only in the awareness of those ideals, but *within* those ideals and *according* to those ideals (the ideals of the good life) while, at the same time, positioning ourselves so as to be thoroughly mistrusting of and disillusioned by them. And there is an historical set-up here which we mustn't ignore, and which squares this set of

²⁴⁵ A hoover with luminescent arrows pointing outwards is one of Alessandro Mendini and Studio Alchimia's *redesigns* exhibited in 1980 at the exhibition *L'Oggetto Banale* ('The Banal Object'). The same treatment is reserved to a lamp, a pair of shoes and an iron, amongst others.

²⁴⁶ Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. London: Duke, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 193 - 195

coordinates and helps them make sense: the *autonomia* movement, which as Berlant observes is connected ‘in Italy to a much broader set of activities’²⁴⁸, is at the moment of Mendini’s writing precisely at the critical point which is the *wake* of the Movement, the consciousness of a failure. But not the failure of an ideal which had remained in the sphere of the *distal*, but of an ideal which had moved into very close *proximity*, and it’s this (cruel) proximity which puts us not only in the ‘nonetheless’ and in the ‘although’, but also in the tragic ‘almost’, in the ‘verging on’, in the very closely *might have been*. It isn’t by chance that Mendini acknowledges these two routes, those of armed subversion and of the paradise of drugs, which had Mendini been writing in Britain, in France, or in the US would have seemed peculiar, and strangely immoderate: these are the two very real routes which ended the ‘77 movement which is not only, as we know, a philosophical current but an extremely widespread, ‘practised’ social force. It is not conjecture to speak of arms and drugs, because Mendini’s writings are historically locatable exactly in these two desperate solutions to a lost battle. It is a well known fact that the ties between the Italian Communist Party and the Movement broke when a fringe of the Movement decided that it was time ‘to raise the level of the battle’; and it is an equally well known fact that many of the survivors (perhaps we should call them fireflies) of the 77 Movement found, and consequently lost themselves in the ‘paradise of drugs’ of the heroin boom (after the Moro affair heroin became very suddenly, very easily available... let’s call it a coincidence). The third route, ‘the hardest’, is indeed a kind of survival, but it has nothing to do with what we would normally call optimism – it is a survival

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 301. Berlant writes ‘broader’ meaning beyond the work of Antonio Negri which, she writes, is what is mostly known in the States; but it is broader in a wider sense: the term *activities* is the right term. It is a school of thought with extremely ‘practical’ formulations.

(laced with strategies for killing time, killing rage, killing frustration without getting hurt) which is ‘unhappy’ and ‘conscious’ and which *knows* that in order to survive (a survival in full knowledge, to borrow Berlant’s gravely precise words, that life does *not* add up to something²⁴⁹) it will have to resign itself completely to the although, to the in spite of, to the nonetheless, to the if only and, painfully, also to a particular breed of Schechnerian *as if* (which is the ‘as if’ that produces the New Spectacularity).

What to do, in effect? One of the strategies Mendini proposes for the attainment of this partially absurd, slightly masochistic nay nightmarish state of being, is the literal interpretation and repetition of everything which fuels the unhappy consciousness, of everything the unhappy consciousness witnesses, wants, and feels; the conscious decision to work *ad hoc* for the ‘happy consciousness’ from the critical-but-resolute stance of unhappiness. As an intellectual operation this also speaks significantly of its not, or not only, being a *post-77* ‘solution’, but an alternative, at the same time, to the various ‘77 solutions. I am reminded of an article by Mario Tronti, ‘Our Operaismo’, in which he describes Romano Alquati’s influence on the publication *Quaderni Rossi* as ‘intellectual disarray elevated to the level of genius’²⁵⁰. He concludes: ‘in other words, we brought together a fine old madhouse’²⁵¹. Let me show you a madhouse: ‘the unscrupulous use of fake materials

²⁴⁹ ‘Whatever the *experience* on optimism in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. (...) Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world “add up to something”. What happens when those fantasies start to fray – depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash?’ Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. London: Duke, 2011. p. 2. I formulate the above as one of the possible answers – historically and geographically and culturally bound – to Berlant’s question, to the question of *what happens when those fantasies start to fray*.

²⁵⁰ Tronti, Mario. ‘Our Operaismo’, in *New Left Review* 73, Jan / Feb 2012, pp. 119 - 140. p. 125

²⁵¹ Ibid. p.125

(typically marble), the romantic use of natural materials (vases made out tree-trunk), dimensional aberration (miniature windows), strident combinations of colours, materials, and shapes (pink and brown, metal and fabric, visibly out-of-scale geometries), the rhetoric of tradition and of dynamism (walls in bare stone and aerodynamic fireplaces), the estrangement of signification (living rooms that look like taverns), the redundancy of quantities (excess of balconies) etc. Let's put together these complicated ingredients with a concentrated hyperrealism and our house will look like a shellfish, in which the separate entities and the whole will be polemically incoherent'²⁵².

The shellfish-house was elaborated on over the years. Leafing through old issues of *Domus* or *Casabella*, as somebody interested in performance and not particularly well-versed in interior design, I gather two impressions that tower above the rest: firstly, a disconcerting sense of humour; secondly, a very distinct sense of things not 'staying still'. Mendini's 'infinite furniture' (which Magazzini devised their piece *Zone Calde* for) is made up of so many combinations of shapes and colours that the shape of the whole is impossible to remember or even sketch: dining chairs of different shapes and dimensions, an abundance of patterns (zig zags, polka dots, isolated tiny triangles), tables and chairs floating mid-air on glass, or held up by a central pyramid, or with broken legs, or legs in the shape of spirals and springs. These rooms look like the moment you open the front door, a strobe light would follow you about. They are houses in stop-motion, houses that have their own rhythm, houses that dance, move, rearrange themselves while you're out. And an abundance of *trompe l'oeil*, because eye-fooling really is paramount: is it a painting or a window? A painting or a wall? A

²⁵² Mendini, Alessandro. *Per un'Architettura Banale*. Unpublished text, 30th October 1979. In the Atelier Mendini archives (aterliermendini.com)

person or a painting? There are even virtual *trompe l'oeils*, such as Carlo M. Asnaghi's *videograms* and *kryptopacks*: these are diurnally invisible shapes which magically appear after sunset; they are light sculptures made to look like the 'last glow of a television.'²⁵³

•

In 1981, in a piece entitled *Cosmesi Universale*, 'Universal Cosmesis', Mendini wrote that he was, above all, interested in the transient nature of *decoration*:

decoration disappears as fast as it appeared, and in the moment it *does* appear we love it madly: it's like snow, confetti, festoons (...), things that energise the cold structures of our everyday life. Giving in to decoration is to accept that people don't communicate profoundly, that intimately we are solitary, but that what can circulate amongst us is what passes through the skin, the surface: and I'm attracted to this 'depth of the superficial'.²⁵⁴

Surface games: the rubbish dump of the politically abject grows sentence by sentence. *Reductions*, impoverishments, games that give up, that give in. In his discussion of op art and neo geo in the 1980s, Hal Foster speaks of abstract painting 'reduced to design, decoration or even kitsch'²⁵⁵; later, in discussing commodity sculpture and appropriation art of the American 1980s, he notes that 'as Reaganism spread in the early 1980s, the dandyish position became less ambiguous, more cynical, and the star of Warhol obscured all others'²⁵⁶; Foster

²⁵³ Restany, Pierre. 'The Future of the City in a Home Today / Il Futuro di una Città in una Casa Oggi', article about the work and home of Massimo Asnaghi. In *Domus* 636, February 1983. Republished in *Domus* Vol. IX: 1980 – 1984. Edited by Charlotte and Peter Fiell. London: Taschen, 2007. pp. 342-343

²⁵⁴ Mendini, Alessandro. 'Cosmesi Universale'. Supplement to *Domus* no. 617, 1981.

²⁵⁵ Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. p. 100

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 122

discusses the contradictory demands on artists ‘to advance critical transformation in art and to demonstrate the historical futility of this project (...) to be avant-gardist and to be conformist’²⁵⁷, a *double jeu* which lead, finally, again according to Foster, to the decline of the aesthetic of cynical reason and the death of the cynical artist in the 1980s. A game which flirted with capitalism, with yuppies, with corporate art, with the art market and the ‘happy’ choice to conform with the dominant model.

The ideas illustrated by Mendini are so easy, too easy to blame; any movement of *giving in*, especially when that *giving in* is into the banal, into decoration, into frivolity, sometimes even into kitsch, is just too open to ambiguousness to allow for any intellectual enthusiasm. Or, maybe, for any intellectual enthusiasm that desires some firm ground under its feet. In encountering Mendini’s *Universal Cosmesis* essay I remembered an article I had read in *La Repubblica* in 2010, by Adriano Sofri; I remembered it because this notion of *universal cosmesis* had caught my eye. Sofri’s use of the words *universal cosmesis* referred, precisely, to Berlusconi: ‘Berlusconi’s speciality isn’t the tabula rasa, it’s the touch up’; Sofri distinguishes between his ‘personal cosmesis’ (heels, make-up, plastic surgery) and his ‘universal cosmesis’, ‘which is philosophical. Remember the flowerbeds in Genoa? They also were ruined by the defeatists who went to sleep at the Diaz school, who let themselves be tortured in the barracks at Bolzaneto. Cosmesis works: the verb ‘to work’ synthesises the question quite well. The rubbish on the streets of Naples disappears. And Saviano, that killjoy, has to go and find out where it’s gone’²⁵⁸. Adriano Sofri, the author of this article, was also a

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 123

²⁵⁸ Sofri, Adriano. ‘Berlusconi, Saviano e la Cosmesi Universale.’ in *Repubblica* 20th April 2010. Sofri is referring to the prettifying of the city of Genoa for the G8 in 2001 and to the Naples rubbish scandal in 2008 / 2009, both instances of ‘cosmetic’ cover-up of situations of violence and/or degradation.

leader of the *Lotta Continua* movement, and the director of its most widely read press organ, the publication *Lotta Continua* – one of the most important publications of the 77 Movement. I say this to demonstrate how the lines are very clear: in theory it's very clear, in Italy, to see where the *correct* way of thinking is. Stances, people, movements – in theory – delineate very crystalline territory around themselves. The 'correct way of thinking' firmly grips its intellectual sceptre and recycles its binary images *ad infinitum*: cosmesis, spectacle, mud, lead.

But the problem is that in the dark all cats are grey. Let us return to Mendini's dark forest (which is also the forest of so many of the theatre makers whose work is discussed here): 'I see more invisible things than visible ones'. There's a kind of binary streaming that takes hold after 'the death of a revolutionary proletariat', and especially from the late 1970s / early 1980s onwards, in the way Italy tells the story of Italy to itself²⁵⁹. On the one hand,

²⁵⁹ At the recent Association for the Study of Modern Italy conference at Senate House, London (November 2013), I was struck, listening to a number of papers about Italy at the crossroads of the 1970s and 1980s, and then at the start of Berlusconi's political career, in 1994, by the fact that we are still and again continuing to fall into a set of dichotomies, exemplified by the engagement / hedonism dichotomy: engagement and hedonism, lead and mud, ideology and marketing etc. Why is this? Cynically, we could probably say that these twenty years have robbed us of such an amount of imaginative potential that even emerging scholars in Italian studies keep meandering in the same vein. But what I would tend to favour is a more nuanced, and maybe critics would say a more postmodern answer: in this whirlwind of the past twenty years (which nonetheless begins, formally, in the 1980s), as well as all the alleged (and probably true, but for this reason) cultural degradation, Italy (and its system) has produced the theory of that degradation at the same time.

This theory, just like the images which it is theory of, is irresistible, on two accounts: (i) within it, everything fits like the pieces of a puzzle, 2 + 2 equals 4, the lines are extremely clear; (ii) it is apocalyptic, and hence extremely, fatally attractive: as narratives go, this one *certainly* offers a 'soaking'. Furthermore, this theory makes it obligatory to side either with one faction or another, because this marked bi-polarism is also a question of image, producing the effect that the Left actively plays a game in which it can never see the cards (because it refuses to). We will continue to see the image as a locus of deceit until we leave it to others and refuse to collaborate in its making - it is, I believe, precisely a stubborn lack of *imagination* that is affecting Italian intellectuals: they refuse to form and manipulate images. So when, in 2013, we are still commenting on Berlusconi's blue suit versus Occhetto's brownish soviet look at their televised duel in 1994, everyone in the room *laughs*. And so be it. But in-jokes aren't very productive. In fact, the very point of in-jokes is that for the majority (for example for the majority of the electorate), the whole operation is *boring*.

politics, honesty, respect, struggle, *impegno*; on the other, television, advertising, hedonism, the ‘PPB’. How do we know that in the early 1980s an ideology didn’t produce itself, briefly, which thought it was possible to interfere in the process of cosmesis, to play within it in order, perhaps, to subvert it? How can we be sure that it wasn’t there and that it didn’t disappear, like a firefly, like yet another missed opportunity? What proof do we have that hedonism is the result of a ‘post ideological breeze’ and of a forgetful conformation to an idea of ‘giving up’? What markers are visible, in retrospect, that can help us distinguish ‘real hedonism’ (‘happy hedonism’?) from an ‘unhappy hedonism’ which is dancing in the nonetheless? And which of the two is ‘real’? And does it matter? Did it matter? Will it? For example, will it matter after Berlusconi?²⁶⁰ Will that firefly of an affective stance return? Perhaps it will: I think it’s worth thinking about – *just in case*.

These and other questions I shall return to in Part III. For now, I want to keep insisting on imaginary spaces, dwelling in imaginary space until, to quote a famous film, we know every detail of those spaces with our eyes closed. So for now, I want to turn to America: ‘America is the cinema and the cinema is America; America at the cinema, in the eyes of those who never saw it’. There is an essay / interview by Oriana Fallaci with Pier Paolo Pasolini on his visit to New York. She expects him to be horrified: ‘you’re a Marxist in New York! Is it really possible that America seduces everyone, that all the communists arrive grumpy and then leave in love?’²⁶¹. He leaves her with this sentence, which she calls ‘the

²⁶⁰ The final version of this text was written in November 2013. In subsequent editing sessions in July and August 2014 I have chosen to leave this sentence here, but meanwhile the situation *has* changed, undeniably. Which is why I also add this footnote. There may be space for some kind of timid euphoria – but we can never be too careful.

²⁶¹ Fallaci, Oriana. Pasolini a New York / *Un marxista a New York*. Interview, in L’Europeo, 13th October 1966

polaroid of a Marxist in New York':

This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. I will never forget this until the day that I die. I'm so disappointed I have to leave, I feel robbed. I feel like a child with a cake, a cake with many layers, the child doesn't even know which one he'll love the most, all he knows is that he wants to, he must, eat them all. One by one. And the moment he is about to bite into the cake, they snatch it away from him.²⁶²

²⁶² Ibid.

***America! America! # 1*²⁶³:**

Antonio Syxty's *Gas Station, with Soft Breeze* (1980)

Mass seductions. In the literature of its time, the notion of the metropolitan in particular and of the New Spectacularity in general, appears inextricably bound to a notion of mass pleasures, mass media, mass images. There are paradoxes in this – experimental theatre is everything but mass, of course: it is small-circuit and obsolete. Most commentators at the time, swept up by the metropolitan wave, chose not to dwell on these inherent contradictions²⁶⁴ – and, given that the wave was still turning, this is understandable. Now that the wave has passed, however, a mindfulness to those contradictions reveals much more than could be exposed by executing a mere repetition, a written gallery of images staged. Rather than simply mentioning palm trees (mass tourism), the cult of the body (mass leisure), television (mass media), club culture (mass ritual) and asserting that the New Spectacularity was gathering its images in mass seductions it is, now, much more interesting and useful to move on and ask ourselves why but especially, how.

As part of her own 'gallery', published in 1983, Silvana Sinisi speaks thus of the urban

²⁶³ A lyric for this chapter, lifted from the canon of Italo-Disco: *You're like a star, you're so fine you're so far / I can see you only on my TV / Your magic places and your famous streets / You're in my dreams, you are my wonderland / I close my eyes, and dream of you again / America! America! Come on boys, to America! Baby's Gang, America, on Challenger* (LP). Parma: Memory Records, 1985.

²⁶⁴ In general, most criticism of the time on the New Spectacularity buys the set-up wholesale, wholeheartedly and unquestioningly: as the concept of metropolis is hardly ever questioned, neither is the mass-mediatic set of references without the shadow of a mass-mediatic appeal (or indeed as only its shadow...). The 'paradox' referred to by Oliviero Ponte di Pino regarding the gap between the breadth of the New Spectacularity's world and the reality of its circumstances is the only explicit reference to the question I have found, a question which in my first contacts with the New Spectacularity arose immediately (which is also why I chose to open this thesis with the description of a Dàimon Kybernetes piece in Monreale). In a sense, it's a shame that nobody mentions it, because it is one of its most fascinating cruxes; at the same time, it is very interesting that nobody mentions it: perhaps a less 'hype-savvy' spectatorship is going on here, or perhaps the wave is so collective that everybody is riding it. Or perhaps these are invested, desiring spectators after all.

mythology of the New Spectacularity:

the shiny, glossy images of the cinema, of television, of fashion, the heroes of cartoons, the faces of advertising, winking at us at every street corner – the whole urban Olympus. A rootless mythology, consumed and renovated in the quick succession of a season, subjugated to accelerated processes of obsolescence just like any other product intended for mass consumption.²⁶⁵

The problem with observations such as the above is that they don't tell us anything about desire. In my delineation for an affective historiography in Part I of this thesis I wrote that (I repeat myself) 'this study is injected time and again with a question of desire – my stance in this study implies that if an image circulates, at the theatre, it does so because it has a libidinal charge that makes its circulation worthwhile'. Let me return to this: why it would be desirable for such images to circulate so pervasively – why did people want to go to see this work, and why was it made? If what the New Spectacularity staged, time and again and always with the same images, was a throwaway rootless mythology intended for mass consumption (without mass audiences), why would people be interested in going to, returning to, writing (often quite enamouredly) about the work?

The purpose of the next two turns of this investigation is to spend some time observing an imagined idea of 'America' as staged in some instances of Neo-Spectacular performance. America-as-locus is a recurrent figure of the metropolitan imagination – and as locus of mass seduction par excellence, we could say this is quite natural. The question is how and why it got to occupy so much space *in the first place*.

²⁶⁵ Sinisi, Silvana. *Dalla Parte dell'Occhio: Esperienze Teatrali in Italia 1972-1982*. Rome: Kappa, 1983. p. 60

•

‘First places’ are a good place to move from. Especially, perhaps, when there isn't one, or where a first place isn't offered: I want to concentrate on that performance that didn't take place. Antonio Syxty's *Stazione di Benzina, con Leggero Vento* (‘Gas Station, with Soft Breeze’) is the aforementioned performance which unhappened, in Milan, circa 1980. It forms part of a transition period in Syxty's work at the time: having worked as a solo artist from 1976 onwards under the production company name ‘Oh!-Art’, between 1979 and 1980 Syxty went on to produce a piece, *Dreaming of a Supercadillac Gastric Gasoline (Vaseline)*, staged at midnight in a launderette in Piazza delle Crociate, Milan called ‘Lavanderia Americana’ – this inaugurated what I have come to refer to as an ‘American period’ in his work. Soon after that (by mid-1981) Syxty began to work on a series of pieces which probed the edges between the theatrical and the televisual, the theatrical and the world of fashion, the theatrical and the world of advertising. Where he wasn't pushing at confines that were already in place he was, in many ways, inventing those confines – and therein lies his most significant contribution to the performative languages developed by the Neo-Spectacular and the work he has mostly been remembered for (we shall return to the post-1981 period). This American phase, then, ended up revealing itself as a means to an end, and as such it is also significant: its evolution is significant.

The American period incorporates six pieces, or three pieces, plus two, plus one imaginary. *Gas Station, with Soft Breeze* was intended as the final movement of a trilogy of which the first two movements had been a show called *Jack and Jackie*, also known as *Jack*

and Jackie: *Wish I Could Fly like Superman* (1980) and another piece entitled *Kennedy: the Assassination* which toured Italy extensively in the Spring and Summer of 1980. *Gas Station* served, initially, as something akin to closing credits for these two pieces. It is an outdoor, site-specific piece (a gas station is required), extremely minimal (few actions, few words, few tableaux), highly evocative (highly *atmospherical*) yet relatively demanding in logistical terms: it calls for a series of cars, motorbikes, a number of extras driving the vehicles and, finally, a number of taxis. Inside the taxis was where the second part of the performance was designed to happen (the radios in the taxis would allow for various dialogues to be in conversation with one another). As is imaginable, *Gas Station* never happened because of its logistics: apart from being organisationally taxing for a solo artist, the piece would have been expensive. The not-taking-place of *Gas Station*, with *Soft Breeze* resulted in Syxty writing another piece derived from a conceptual ‘extract’ of *Gas Station*, called *Eloise, Vento Leggero, Eloise* (‘Eloise, Soft Breeze, Eloise’, 1980), in which the gas station is cut and all attention is focused on Eloise, the ‘soft breeze’. Syxty’s writings and notes on *Gas Station* and on *Eloise* refer to another two pieces as part of the ‘trilogy’ (which is clearly no longer a trilogy): a piece called *Kennedyne* (1979), made quickly after *Kennedy: the Assassination* and the piece which opens the cycle, the aforementioned launderette piece, *Dreaming of a Supercadillac Gastric Gasoline (Vaseline)*.

We are in the presence, then, of five shows, one of which didn’t take place, all of which fit into each other like a set of Chinese boxes. From my conversations with Syxty and from studying his vast collection of notes, letters, presentations, scripts and drawings, I have reason to believe that the largest box was set to be *Gas Station* – that the pieces before it were to

culminate in *Gas Station*, and that the pieces made after it were a means of replacing, or of executing otherwise, its inherent theatrical idea. Syxty returned to the structure of *Gas Station* and to its idea with more unhappened pieces over the 1980s: there are other ‘car pieces’ which work on the observation of a scene amongst cars, or in a drive-in situation, followed by the dispersal of the audience in cars where the narration continues, and the transportation of the audience to different locations by different routes counting both as part of the narration itself and as part of the final resolution of the performances (all three pieces end with the audience being ‘abandoned in the outskirts’ of Milan, ‘abandoned at the port’ of Genoa or Bari: they are left to make their own way home)²⁶⁶. These other sketches, and long conversations with their author about car pieces in general²⁶⁷, give me reason to believe that *Gas Station* constitutes some sort of crux in Syxty’s *ars poetica*: a crux which has to do with America, with the Italian hinterland, with a breeze, with a woman, and with cars. A crux which used these images, these spaces, these fragments of mass imagination in order to arrive at something which has to do, in turn, with ideas of ‘apparent space’, ‘naturalistic landscape’, and ‘useless painting’. With ‘a denigratory essay on conceptual theatre’, and with ‘a long kiss’, as illustrated in the opening notes to the *Gas Station* script:

²⁶⁶ *Cargo* was a performance, *Cargo 1900* was a video, which was made, as far as I understand, but which has probably disappeared – they are dated 1982-1984. Both happened at ports (the port of Genoa and the port of Bari). Unpublished archival material.

²⁶⁷ My time with Syxty was a time of media attention to Cronenberg’s *Cosmopolis* and Carax’s *Holy Motors*, both of which Syxty felt a resonance with in his own previous car-based and unhappened work. The question ‘where do limousines go to sleep?’ (inherited from Don DeLillo), present in both films, is in the script for *Cargo*, which is more dystopian, more science-fiction than *Gas Station*. Also in *Cargo*, much like in *Holy Motors*, we have cars speaking to each other – in fact, *Cargo* is partly a love affair between cars, narrated by a car.

Gas Station, with Soft Wind. By Antonio Syxty.

In a real gas station a man watches a film on television. Outside, amongst the parked cars, someone moves, in near darkness. A boy and a girl kiss for a long time (20 minutes approximately). An ambulance awaits a wounded person that doesn't arrive. The tape of the performance transmits in the air songs by Bruno Lauzi, then space-music, then a conversation with A. Syxty, etc. Nothing much happens.

Gas Station is an apparent space, a naturalistic landscape, a useless painting. Ideally the show is the end of a cycle entitled KENNEDY and developed in three precedent movements. G.S. does nothing but conclude an idea of violence with an unexpected tranquillity. Only towards the end of the performance a resolute possibility is caught sight of, when the audience is made to get into a number of taxis and is transported to secret destinations. Other radio communications and segments of conversations come in and underline a stillness which by now has been lost, forgotten, obliged to a progressive self-annihilation.

The wind in the title appears under the form of a document, a denigratory essay on conceptual theatre. After the wind, nothing remains apart from the faded image of a long kiss between Syxty (actor-author) and Eloise (theatre-territory).²⁶⁸

The purpose of devoting some concentrated attention to the script of this unhappened piece – *Gas Station* – and to the metaphor which carries it – *Eloise* – is not to reflect on the real / unreal situation which makes an imagined, *fake* (we shall return to this word) America be staged in a 'real' Italy. I have already argued how the geographical vastness many Neo-Spectacular works speak of is not reflected in the real, of how its images are not bound to a referential elsewhere. And for thirty years or so, by the time we reach the early 1980s, Italian pop has been sung with American accents, 'imitation' films have been made, 'imitation' music has been made, hundreds of films, novels, comic strips 'set in America' have been made and

²⁶⁸ Syxty, Antonio. Presentation for *Stazione di Benzina, con Leggero Vento*. Unpublished archival material.

staged in Italy. So what is more interesting, since we arrive at this long history through experimental theatre and in the early 1980s, is to look at how all of this has already rubbed off, so to speak, on the imagination Italy may have of itself. What is more interesting is to look at a contamination between imagined space and ‘real’ space, at the no-man’s-land of *inhabitability* where one idea of space and place merges into ‘the film’. It is not that, by staging this gas station, Syxty’s wishes are to perform a simple make-believe game in ‘America’; nor is *Gas Station* some sort of social comment on the mass mores of its time. ‘America’ speaks back to ‘Italy’: the two entities in inverted commas are in conversation with each other as cultural loci, and the cultural locus leaves its mark on ‘real’ place. *Gas Station*, said in English, can be said to, somehow, truly inhabit the outskirts of some Italian city or other (perhaps Pier Vittorio Tondelli’s gas station on the outskirts of Modena). In the mechanisms of the *metropolitan imagination* (the mechanisms of its complicated longings, sufferings, disappointments²⁶⁹) these entities can be seen to truly live and breathe together.

In his *Tracce: Nichilismo Moderno e Postmoderno*, Maurizio Ferraris – one of the scholars present at Bartolucci’s 1981 *Paesaggio Metropolitano* event – condenses the traits of ‘metropolitan aesthetics’ into three definitions: (i), as an aesthetics of pure repetition (repetition without difference); (ii), as an aesthetics of the simulacrum, intended as a non-representational ‘reflex without origin’; (iii), as a transcendental aesthetics. On this third note he continues:

the simulacrum no longer produces aesthetic effects: rather, it induces concrete experiences, because aesthetics becomes a doctrine which is reflexive and perceptual at the same time, hence it is ‘transcendental’. Only an irremediably

²⁶⁹ Claudia Castellucci comes to mind, in her *Santa Sofia Manifesto* (1984): ‘we know the real and it has disappointed us since we were 4 years old’.

nostalgic Weltanschauung could see in this crepuscule a dramatic event. In the metropolitan aesthetics there is nothing worth commemorating. If repetition affirms an indifference between the primary and the derivate, we can see how a metropolitan aesthetics is a transcendental aesthetics, how aesthetic experience differs in no way from 'real' (emotional, cogniscent) experience, and how, finally, the metropolis is the locus of an intense aesthetic experience, still fundamentally misunderstood by the 'dramatic' memorialism of modern aesthetics.²⁷⁰

Each one of the elements outlined by Ferraris appears in Syxty's sketch for the unmade piece: it repeats without difference (or attempts to repeat without difference), it poses the aesthetic experience as real (and, I must add, poses the real experience as aesthetic) and it is without action, place, history, memory, tradition (to mesh Ferraris' words with Mendini's observations on the *banal*). The problem is that there is, still, a gap: a gap between the two copies, or repetitions, where one can spot the differences although they may not be visible. A gap – or rather gaps, interstices between the 'real' and the 'aesthetic' given precisely by the confusion of the two. A gap, also, between the intensely ahistorical aesthetic now and the sense, emerging almost by mistake, of that 'dramatic memorialism' which characterised the modern aesthetic project.

Let us look for these gaps in the attempt to seal a gap proposed by Syxty in his sketch for *Gas Station*, which is also the first explicitly theoretical hook Syxty supplies us with in terms of his poetics and of his ideology: the long kiss between Syxty (actor-author) and Eloise (theatre-territory). The long kiss is bringing together things that were not together (or which perhaps had been, but at the point of the kiss, were no longer together): in other words, it is

²⁷⁰ Ferraris, Maurizio. *Tracce: Nichilismo Moderno e Postmoderno*. Milan: Mimesis, 2006. p. 92

drawing together performative elements which were, for some reason, separated (it's worth reiterating Syxty's definition of the piece as 'denigratory essay on conceptual theatre'). This kiss may be healing the wound – the gap that hurts – between the postmodern project and its side effects (a nostalgic *Weltanschauung*?), and especially between the 'aesthetic real' and the 'real real' (Italy and America?) because it is a kiss, at once, between (i) a man and a woman; (ii) the actor-author and the theatre-territory; (iii) Antonio Syxty and a hurricane. Eloise, depicted as a woman (in the script for the following piece, *Eloise, Soft Breeze, Eloise* we read sentences such as 'Eloise came closer. I could see her eyes sparkling' and 'Eloise saw Eloise's hands undoing her braids'²⁷¹) is the 'soft breeze' with violent effects: Eloise 'soft breeze' is named after a cyclone, the most destructive tropical cyclone of the 1975 Atlantic hurricane season. Syxty, just like Magazzini in *Crollo Nervoso*, turns the ghost of the past into catastrophe of the future: '*Eloise* is dedicated to the tropical cyclone Eloise which will destroy Florida in the Summer of 1981'²⁷².

Eloise the allegory, then, played in *Eloise* by three different women, is the locus in which the soft wind, the blonde braids, the tropical fantasy taken from marketing and commercials (the model / landscape binary in tourist board advertising for example, which Syxty was keeping an eager eye on at the time²⁷³) is merged with the cyclone, the destructive force, that which 'sweeps everything away'. What Eloise is sweeping away is the previous episodes of the Kennedy cycle, *Jack and Jackie: Wish I Could Fly Like Superman* and

²⁷¹ *Eloise, Vento Leggero, Eloise* script. Unpublished archival material.

²⁷² From the programme notes for *Eloise, Vento Leggero, Eloise*. Published in Bertoldo, Mino et al. *OutOff: 1978-2008*. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008. p. 110.

²⁷³ Later, in part III, we will see some of Syxty's later performances which dealt specifically with television, with fashion and with the young girl: the evolution of Eloise.

Kennedy: the Assassination: it is sweeping away the rise and the fall of the Kennedys, the cinders of a story, of a legend, of a dream, of a nightmare – and of course of the most sensational media story of the 1960s (until cocktails in Saigon, maybe). *After the wind, nothing remains apart from the faded image of a long kiss between Syxty (actor-author) and Eloise (theatre-territory)*: a kiss between the artist and the cyclone. The fact that the ‘character’ of Eloise is at once cyclone and theatre-territory is the most intriguing of her incarnations: the theatre is no longer concept but ‘territory’. ‘Territory’, ‘theatre’ and ‘wind’ or ‘breeze’ are all synonymous with each other and all synonymous with not *woman* exactly, rather t(r)opical female character, later developed in the use of models rather than actresses, to access a zero point of signification, a figure, rather than a character. The theatre is territory and it is breeze: it is not a concept, it is locus and its *genius*. As early as *Gas Station*, we already witness a poetical situation in which the theatre is the landscape and in which the theatre is the wind: we are in a situation in which the theatre is an *atmosphere* and as such – as an atmosphere – it is orchestrated (‘fake’) and inhabitable (‘real’).

Within this wind / theatre / territory a series of vaguely threatening, vaguely criminal cinematic clichés take place: motorbikes, a man and a woman, a man watching a war film. The audience catches glimpses of stories, or rather suggestions, intuitions, single frames from a ‘banal’ film, from the film we have all *always already* seen. But let us remember, from Mendini, not to confuse banal with random: the soft wind carries a carefully chosen stream of intuitions, a stroke of a style, the hint of story which is then left to circulate freely. This soft wind carries what I have referred to previously as a set of brilliances, of speckles of dust, of shadows, and it is with these things that it throws its *whack*, its *soaking*. Far from the

Jamesonian idea of ‘random cannibalisation’ in postmodernity²⁷⁴, *Gas Station* works on a minimal yet powerful process of *evocation*:

Night. / A deserted gas station. / Some cars parked in the dark outside of the ray of light of the quartz lamps. / Soft Wind.

Night. / Behind the station a man is watching a war film, planes, on TV. / Nightshift.

Night. / A motorbike enters the area of the gas station. It stops rumbling at one of the pumps. It seems undecided. For a moment the man turns away from his television. / The motorbike, rumbling, hesitates and then drives off into the night.

Night. / In one of the cars parked in the near darkness he tries to unbutton her shirt. He wants to touch her breasts. They move agitatedly inside the automobile. They kiss. They continue stroking each other / The motorbike reappears. Then another motorbike. With their lights they illuminate the scene inside the car. The man exits the car and stops at the car door. He stares. The motorbikes leave. / The girl comes out of the car wearing a bra and holding a blouse in her hand. / She attempts to run away but he stops her. / Light signals.

Night. / Ten taxis arrive at the gas station. / They recruit the passengers and leave for secret destinations. / The man returns to his film.

The script is a collection of five vaguely uneasy *situations* which an audience – perhaps *that* audience in particular – is perfectly equipped to decipher and, especially, synthesise. The script is made up of empty gestures from which some sort of atmospheric dust is emanated: this is the level the piece works on, the level of the pulviscular, which is also, via a series of

²⁷⁴ Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke, 1991. p.18

philosophical turns which I shall return to, what Mario Perniola calls the shadow, the aura after reproduction, the aura of mass-produced images²⁷⁵. *Gas Station*, then, inaugurates, in some way, the performative form of the ‘empty mechanisms of a game’, as Paolo Landi refers to Syxty’s work in his article ‘Antonio Syxty, Cover Boy’²⁷⁶. In a certain way, it also inaugurates the idea of the fake – paramount in Landi’s discussion, and in much of the criticism that Syxty received – because it is the mediatised, aestheticised *mise en scène* of a breed of banal (a breed of commercial banal, of vaguely 1960s banal, of Americana banal, all of which are driven, in Syxty, by an embrace between love and neo-liberalism) whose atmosphere we recognise. So banal, in fact, that all the stories it contains have already been told, learned, even interiorized: there is no need at all to tell any story in particular. In fact, *Gas Station* tells no stories, while telling a million: in a sense, the script is profoundly narrative by way of making flash up narratives already well known, well-trodden, well beloved and well suffered²⁷⁷.

The film is a ‘war film’, generic, with planes (another one). Something violent happens. An erotic encounter turns sour. An idea of violence is concluded with an unexpected tranquillity. *Eloise* is the rhythm, then, the method, the beat that keeps these flashes of done-

²⁷⁵ Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Trans. M. Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004. The aura in the nonetheless? The aura in the banal? We shall return to this.

²⁷⁶ Landi, Paolo. ‘Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy’ in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 238

²⁷⁷ On the topos of the gas station, on the learned stagings of this kind of americana as well as on the American 1960s (on which Syxty, as we have seen, bases so much of his work and even his name), I quote Emiliano Morreale’s reflections on the making of contemporary Italian nostalgia: ‘to simplify, we could say that what most Italians under 60 consider their nostalgia today follows schemes and modes of perception configured in the 1980s. Never before had people looked to ‘the last 20 years’ with such intensity. It’s a type of looking back in which concurrent memories (regarding class, geography, etc.) are substituted by mediated images, which come from cinema, television, pop music: a *consumer’s* memory. For the first time an idea of nostalgic sensibility for the recent past assumes a complex structure as mass phenomenon (...)’. Morreale, Emiliano. *L’Invenzione della Nostalgia*. Rome: Donzelli, 2009 p. 150.

to-death plot together: soft breeze, motionful yet still. The cars never perform their duty, because they never perform *speed*: they are parked, silent, still. Even the taxis arrive with a smooth matter-of-factness: they are diligent, discreet chauffeurs (Eliot's 'throbbing taxis'?). If it weren't for the soft breeze, or for the tapes playing in voiceover, or for the actions of the girl and the motorbike (but even the motorbike 'seems undecided' as it halts at one of the pumps: bbbbrrrrr) the situation would be one of complete stasis, a frozen tableau, an Ed Rucha: but even then, it lacks the futurism of the Ed Rucha, it lacks its historical dynamism²⁷⁸. As Ricarda Vidal has observed with regard to visual artist Hadrian Pigott's work, too much speed turns motion into stasis, and 'stasis is too close to an idea of death'²⁷⁹. And in a sense, that is precisely where we are: we are *after* the film, *after* the cyclone, *after* the storm, *after* the crash. America is still, very far, yet everywhere: we are *after* America here, for we are in Italy and Italy cannot be America. But, as we know only too well – for we have burned our fingers on this hot iron before – it can try. And it can even succeed (burning), for it isn't London we're talking about this time: what Italy and America *do* share, on different scales, is entire pockets of *nobody watching*. For example Italy can be the America of writer Cesare Pavese's 1933 poem *Atlantic Oil*, in which the America depicted, though experienced, is firmly rooted in the Piedmontese area of the Langhe, rolling hills, vineyards; a place, crucially – and this is crucial about much of agricultural Italy, and most of Italy has an agricultural past – of *emigration* to the United States:

²⁷⁸ An aside: a good counterpart of Mendini's *banal* can be found in Rucha's *vernacular*, and comparing the Studio Alchimia's photographs alongside some of Ed Rucha's works, such as *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, makes for an interesting time. Of course, comparing gas stations is also quite interesting. See Heckert, Virginia. 'Revisiting some Los Angeles Apartments' in *Ed Rucha and Some Los Angeles Apartments*. Los Angeles: Getty Publishing, 2013, pp. 6 - 31

²⁷⁹ Vidal, Ricarda. *Death and Desire in Car Crash Culture: a Century of Romantic Futurisms*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013. p. 7

*Cars pass during the night, too, but more quietly,
so quiet the drunk in the ditch hasn't woken. At night
they don't raise much dust, and the beams of their headlights,
as they round the curve, reveal in full the sign in the field.
Near dawn, they glide cautiously along, you can't hear a thing
except maybe the breeze, and from the top of the hill
they disappear into the plain, sinking in shadows.*²⁸⁰

Cesare Pavese's bio-geography was triangulated like this: the rural, agricultural Langhe – a working countryside, Turin – industrial dream, America – which is oil, sea, factories, motors: *hard labour*. Massimo Mila – a musicologist, antifascist, good friend of Pavese's – wrote that 'we used to adore Turin – modern Turin, not the Baroque Turin – even as it appeared figuratively. Clear perspectives, the geometries of the planning, the rigour of the urban landscape, a beauty made up of lines, volumes, masses. Turin was the river Po, the hill, the barrier, no longer city but not yet countryside. There were taverns with names like 'Far West' and cinemas that showed American films'²⁸¹. I take this detour into a 1930s Piedmont-bound imagination (another, earlier, declination of the metropolitan, perhaps) because I feel it is vital to give Syxty's 1980s longing, 1980s desiring, 1980s suffering, its roots: Eloise is already in *Atlantic Oil*, isn't she? She's the only constant, audible presence. You can hear her when you can't hear the cars, gliding by the roadside, in the hot night, at dawn, in the quiet Italo-American countryside.

•

²⁸⁰ Pavese, Cesare. *Atlantic Oil*. 1933. Einaudi. Translation by Geoffrey Brock.

²⁸¹ Mila, Massimo. *Scritti Civili*. Turin: Einaudi, 1995. See also Smith, Lawrence G. *Cesare Pavese and America: Life, Love, and Literature*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008. 'Far West' is the Italian expression for 'Wild West'.

In a document detailing the conceptual genesis, the formal attributes, the technical specifications of *Eloise, soft Breeze, Eloise* Syxty writes:

I've been thinking about a *gas station*²⁸², with its landscape of strange and bitter solitude; with the lights of the sunset or of the night; with the desolation of certain stations that stand alone in deserted Texas, maybe illusorily a few miles from Dallas, where the murder took place. Over the past year of life – and of the life of *Kennedy*, the project – all of this has progressively been cancelled. The gas station²⁸³ has turned into one of our *stazioni di benzina*, on the outskirts of one of our cities, or abandoned at the entrance of some *paese* or other. The STAZIONE DI BENZINA becomes the unusual, Italian, novelistic, allusive place of a world and a tragedy that are so American.²⁸⁴

Kennedy-the-tragedy is so American, yes; gas-station-the-tragedy, though, or rather stazione-di-benzina-the-tragedy, reveals itself, upon observation, as *so* Italian. It is always after, always before, always distant – always in the position of longing. And, as Susan Stewart and Marc Augé have both, though differently, observed, the positioning of he or she who is longing is central to the aesthetic production of that which is longed for – the longing for another place or time is tainted by the colour of the present, by real circumstance²⁸⁵. The point of view – or, we should perhaps say, the point of non-view – is what defines the imaginary panorama, beyond the hill as if the there and then was always a product of the here and now,

²⁸² In English in the text.

²⁸³ In English in the text.

²⁸⁴ From 'Eloise il particolare', final section of *Eloise, Vento Leggero Eloise*, script version #1. Unpublished archival material.

²⁸⁵ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke, 1984 and Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: an Introduction to Super-Modernity*. London: Verso, 2009. Both texts, in different contexts, refer to longing being coloured not only by the place longed for, but also by the place longed *from*. To an extent, we have seen this stance already in *Crollo Nervoso* – this stance which is also 'a problem'.

of its cultural and historical coordinates, and from here, its *aches*.

All the pop cultural, cinematographic, theatrical, literary insistences on these particular kinds of longing are inherently bound, and inseparable, from an historical fascination which is rooted in the first wave of Italian immigration to the Americas in the early 20th century, during which America begins to be seen as ‘land of opportunities’ for the lowly, lower lifestyles of Italian peasantry (Pavese also deals with this in his *South Seas*, in which he stages the mythical figure of a ‘returning’ uncle, wearing a white suit, attempting to persuade the local peasants to ditch their horses for the cars which he sells, speaking a not-Italian and not-English glocal émigré dialect). The historian Claudia Dall’Osso also points out, crucially, that this deep-seated Americanism has a specific value in terms of a construction of class identities in Italy. Within it, Dall’Osso observes, middle-class ‘modern’ ideals, central to the second wave of Italian industrialisation and to the self-portrayal and self-imagination of the so-called *industrial bourgeoisie* are ‘transported’, so to speak, carried by the travellers of *need*, that is by the emigrants at the lowest level of the social scale: middle-class values transported across the Atlantic by working class ‘envoys’²⁸⁶ (which then become the PPB, in white suits, selling cars).

So America imagined, constructed, ‘pretend’ America, are all a question not only of looking away and looking across, but also of looking *up*: America for Italy is, historically, an aspiration. Amongst the darker, quieter folds of the aspirational, of the success stories, of upwards mobility lie the most fascinating stories, the most fascinating ‘tragedies’ perhaps – one of these stories is, of course, the story of *Kennedy: the Assassination*. As is evident in the

²⁸⁶ Dell’Osso, Claudia. *Voglia d’America: Il mito americano in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*. Rome: Donzelli, 2006.

cinematic overload of dramatic situations such as *Gas Station, with Soft Wind*, looking to America has something to do with looking to the stars. And looking to the stars, of course, is a vulnerable kind of looking: it lays desire bare, it is small, grounded, opaque, limited. What it looks to is unreachable, beautiful, sparkling, infinite. *Amorous flights and lights*, cosmic or cinematic. This looking is a looking lying down, and hence it is also a looking which falls victim – as most of Syxty's operations do – to a belittlement, to an inverse snobbery.

I turn again to a scene in Tondelli's play *Dinner Party* (1984) in which the two older characters, Mavie and Tommy (the reader might recall their dialogue about discreet tragedy and marriage in the opening pages of this thesis), at times marvel and are at times horrified by the super-aestheticised 'video-generation'. Mavie, fascinated, coos: 'Oh come on. You know, you guys are the image generation. Television, rock music, James Dean, electronics! You're postmodern, rubbery, trashy!'²⁸⁷. Tondelli's skepticism towards Mavie's fascination is apparent in the text and developed over the course of the play: *Dinner Party* ends up negating the idea of the rubbery trashy and postmodern generation by exploiting its own rubbery, trashy and postmodern instruments. The more frivolous and empty and silly it all gets, the more a picture is revealed of a suffering generation, and therein lies the crux of the 'tragedy' of *Dinner Party* and also the crux of its being 'discreet': the generation Tondelli depicts suffers; it does so 'on video'. The fact that it does so on video no longer *technically* makes the suffering any less *real*. Tondelli and Syxty alike are aware of the aesthetic attunement to the image – be it television, James Dean, rock music, electronics – that constitutes the aesthetic patrimony of their generation. The more postmodern, rubbery, trashy they are accused of

²⁸⁷ Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Dinner Party*. Milan: Bompiani, 1984. p. 38

being, the more postmodern, rubbery and trashy they become in their generational suffering, as if to say: yes, I am looking to the stars that don't even exist, or the stars that are mass produced, yet they *move* me. As if to say yes, I am suffering for something cheap *and I know it*. As if to say yes, I am libidinally invested in the labour of tricking myself.

Stars. After having insisted for so long on this idea of America, Syxty spent an equally dedicated amount of effort working on other stars – on the idea of the fashion model, especially. Thus, Eloise was effectively relocated by her author from being-locus to being-body: her inevitable transformation (a long kiss of love and neo-liberalism turns locus into body, like a frog turns to prince). In the *Eloise* script we follow her successive evolution, the next 'Eloise manoeuvre'. Having been relocated from locus to body, Eloise's next step is to be *diffused* and become, once and for all, 'soft breeze', intangible yet ever-present and all-consuming. In his notes entitled 'Eloise, the Project', written at the end of 1980, Syxty writes that Eloise – *Eloise* the performance, that is – is:

the detail, the collateral, fortuitous, maybe unimportant action, tele-enlargened a couple of million times. That little TV sparkling inside the station – war film, love film, nightshift, soft breeze – has jumbled all the cards, once again. This sophisticated erotic-nocturnal show only occupies the screen for a couple of seconds. (...) Yet all the outside of the action and of the narrative are in *Gas Station* – with *Eloise* we're still locked in this little video-box. We may never get out, not even after the performance has ended.²⁸⁸

These notes work, in the archive, as a clasp between the two periods: they conclude the Kennedy cycle and, at the same time, open what we could call the Eloise cycle. We could

²⁸⁸ From 'Eloise il progetto', final section of *Eloise, Vento Leggero Eloise*, script version #1. Unpublished archival material.

equally call the two cycles the ‘America’ cycle and the ‘girl’ cycle, by putting the stress on the fact that Eloise is what blows through both, and in a sense is the allegorical and conceptual entity without which neither of them exist: she’s the *atmosphere*. But *this* Eloise manoeuvre takes things one dangerous step further, with its acknowledgement of the TV set ‘which jumbles all the cards, once again’. Here we truly cross a line: here, now, the *soft breeze* is trapped in the *video-box*²⁸⁹. That which is only felt, which cannot be recorded, the *breeze* which isn’t sound and isn’t image and isn’t even scent, the *breeze* which exists only through the skin, only through presence and materiality, only through a physical *being there*, has entered precisely that world of intangible technicolor images which we’re supposedly so far away from, from which a screen irremediably separates us – that *cold* world now contains our *hot* thing. Of course, it’s a step too far: it’ll end in tears. In fact, it’ll end in advertising. And Eloise will become the model in the advert, and in a terrible *mise en abyme*, place herself, the cyclone, right in the eye of another identical cyclone:

The cinema has never shone except by pure seduction, by the pure vibrancy of non-sense - a hot shimmering that is all the more beautiful for having come from the cold. (...) A white face, with the whiteness of signs consecrated to ritualized appearances, no longer subject to some deep law of signification. The sterility of idols is well-known: they do not reproduce, but rise from the ashes, like the phoenix, or from their mirror, like the seductress (...). Their effigy is cinematographic and implies a different sacrifice.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ ‘there is no sensuous distinction between the live and the repeat or the replay: the others are there, if not shut in this room, still caught at this time. One is receiving or monitoring them, like callers; and receiving and monitoring, unlike screening and projection, does not come between their presence to the camera and their presentness to us’. Cavell, Stanley. ‘The Fact of Television’. *Video Culture: a Critical Investigation*. New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986. p. 206

²⁹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *On Seduction*. London: Palgrave, 1991. p. 96

America! America! #2:

Magazzini Criminali's *On the Road* (1982)

While most of the discourse functioning as backdrop to the New Spectacularity was and is one concerned with practices broadly defined as pertaining to a canon of 'visual theatre', the various acts of relocation I have described in a number of instances so far remind us that, within the paradigm of the visual, a series of other infrastructural movements are at work. Indeed this thesis is moving towards a notion of infrastructure, and of interference with the logics of the visual – it is there, towards those discussions, that I am heading. But as I head that way I want to spend a moment thinking about some of the instruments which got us here in the first place, on some of the systems by which we travel.

One of the objects playing a part in this study is an implicit reliance, in New Spectacular work and in its successive *spreading abroad*, as well as in my work on the subject now, on a set of *textual* economies which are, in a sense, easy to move one's attention from because their role in the work (both past and present) is so deeply 'infra-structural' that their structures become almost invisible. In remembering (or in not forgetting) that this investigation moves with and through an engine of textuality, what I also wish to point to is that albeit an insistence on a language pertaining to the visual (or indeed *because of* an insistence, de facto, on a language), language never disappeared from the New Spectacularity. Its 'reductions' (reduction to quote, for example, or reduction to lyric) should, if we are to listen, be taken as concentrations and indeed as augmentations: the morsel of language, the bullet of

language, the *soaking* of language²⁹¹, the *whack*²⁹².

Nestled in amongst the critics' terms, especially with regard to Magazzini Criminali and notably Federico Tiezzi (who eventually became the director of the company, which eventually – apparently – 'returned to text'²⁹³), is the idea of 'scrittura scenica', *scenic writing*, an Italian declination of terms locatable somewhere between dramaturgy, mise en scène and visual theatre²⁹⁴. The term indicated that the entire 'scenic' economy and elaboration of performance was to be seen as a form of writing, as a textual and in fact even scriptural practice – a notion which, although it may hold no mysteries nor surprises in the post-post-dramatic now, might have served a critical agenda which sought to shield the visual from a possible cheapening in the then. It is a term used chiefly 'against' reduction, arguing not that language is just another scenic element, but that every other element forms part of the act of 'writing the stage'. By implementing what in effect is a mere reversal of perspectives, the use of the term 'scenic writing' seems to secure the predominance of a practice of writing, and with that predominance the conservation of a certain *nobility* of the theatre, garnered in its

²⁹¹ I refer again to a passage from Perniola, Mario. *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*. Trans. C. Woodall. London: Verso, 1995. p. 145: 'actors and spectators are as much part of the stage scenery as are wings and backcloth: if the scene drips with emotion, they too get a soaking'.

²⁹² I refer again to Georges Didi-Huberman's use of the word 'whack' in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. Trans. J. Goodman Philadelphia: Penn State Press, 2005. p. 24

²⁹³ I say 'apparently' because the 'return to text' oft-cited as the end-point of the New Spectacularity strikes me, especially in the case of Magazzini but this can be extended more generally, as not really a 'return' – so when Marco Palladini and Franco Cordelli noted that while most of these theatre-makers showed 'all the marks of their inexperience with theatrical text' in the mid-1980s, Tiezzi, Lombardi and D'Amburgo performed better, this is not really surprising if we consider text as always having been organic to Magazzini's work. (Cigliana, Simona. 'Sette Domande sul Teatro d'Avanguardia a Franco Cordelli e a Marco Palladini.' *L'Illuminista* 1.2/3. pp. 187-232)

²⁹⁴ The paternity of the term *scrittura scenica* is actually Giuseppe Bartolucci's, who published his first book on the subject in 1968, but it is probably fair to say that Lorenzo Mango was indeed 'insisting' on the concept, especially in the context of Magazzini Criminali's work. See Mango, Lorenzo, *Teatro di Poesia: Saggio su Federico Tiezzi*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1994 and Mango, Lorenzo. *La Scrittura Scenica: Un codice e le sue pratiche nel teatro del Novecento*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2003.

relationship to the textual, to the text.

If we look carefully though, as I maintained above, the textual and indeed the practice of writing and speaking text had never been eclipsed from the metropolitan landscape, a landscape in which logos had always dwelled: its behaviour may have been landscape-like, in fact it may even have been breeze-like, or heat-like, but all of this *was* logos²⁹⁵. In Tiezzi's work especially, or what is known as Tiezzi's work and is, or at least for a good number of years was, Magazzini's work²⁹⁶, such a division between logos and landscape had never existed and as such, in a sense, there was not even a need to 'sew it back together'. Later works (more patently carrying Tiezzi's signature this time), the body of work referred to as 'theatre of poetry' performed between 1985 and 1987, did nothing but develop a line of research which had been inaugurated as early as the first Carrozzone works in the early '70s. Although later works confronted 'the text' in a more traditional sense, they did not constitute a change of direction, but a point of maturity²⁹⁷.

Between 1979 and 1984, that is in the time the company used the name 'Magazzini Criminali', the group produced at least three 'major' scripts (*Crollo Nervoso*, *Sulla Strada*,

²⁹⁵ I am making reference here to some of the concepts expressed in Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 'From Logos to Landscape: text in contemporary dramaturgy'. *Performance Research: Letters from Europe* Vol 2. No.1 Spring 1997. London: Routledge, 1997

²⁹⁶ I make this point because Magazzini Criminali's work is often billed as Federico Tiezzi's. While Tiezzi indeed went on to become the true 'author' of Magazzini, it seems to me that at least the pieces made between 1979 and 1984, if not those made since the very beginnings until 1984, were truly the fruits of a collaboration between Tiezzi, Sandro Lombardi and Marion D'Amburgo, who, nonetheless, often disappear from the conversation when it shifts into the historical (similarly to what happens with Martone and Falso Movimento, with Barberio Corsetti and La Gaia Scienza, and with Romeo Castellucci and the Societas). I find this need for the auteur in Italian historiography quite unproductive: it gives an inexact idea of the processes of production.

²⁹⁷ See the aforementioned Mango, Lorenzo, *Teatro di Poesia: Saggio su Federico Tiezzi*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1994. As Giannachi and Kaye remind us, though, Tiezzi's first writings on the subject are dated 1982. I have to add (painfully) here, that apart from a point of maturity they also maybe constituted a reversal due to lack of funding.

Genet a Tangeri). In these scripts language plays a pivotal role in the fabrication of the inhabitable image, and does so in shifting the behaviour of language at each turn to push towards the atmospherical reification operated by each performance: these scripts show us processes that look like *reductions* and are in fact *concentrations* which in turn reveal themselves as *augmentations*. The triangulation is similar to what we've just seen happening to Eloise, although executed in very different terms. Reduction, concentration, augmentation in a sense *is* the shift from territory to body to breeze – these manoeuvres stage similar mechanisms of refraction. If in *Crollo Nervoso* the accumulative language-as-lyric found the space between nonsense and the ultra-sense of ghost-dancing, in a sense in *Sulla Strada*, the script I want to turn to now, language *is* the image. And the image is again America, and America is the road – the language is the road, *in the eyes of those who never saw it*²⁹⁸. Because if there is something that language can do, it is showing and feeling without images. Let me turn to Tiezzi's notes for *Sulla Strada*, which start like this:

²⁹⁸ Angelo Curti, collaborator of Falso Movimento, in Giannachi, G. and Kaye, N. *Staging the Post-avant-garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*. Oxford: P. Lang, 2002. p. 42. The sentence is used with regard to Falso Movimento, who stage yet another imaginary America.

A bridge on the motorway near Bologna. It says: "I will love you forever".

This is where the road starts, Kerouac's road, escape towards the south.

A TEXT (a novel read when we were fifteen, the very idea of freedom)

SAL PARADISO AND AMERICA

THE ADVENTURE

LONG DISTANCES

SUNSET

THE DAMNED LOVERS

VENEZUELA

THESE ARE THE HORIZON-WORDS

VENEZUELA

SAL PARADISO

DEAN

*THE GANG OF WILD BOYS*²⁹⁹

Some a priori considerations, then: we start in Bologna, at a motorway bridge. On the bridge it says "I will love you forever". So the bridge, Bologna, the idea of heading south, the words on the bridge and the text are the same, notably they are *a novel read when we were fifteen, the very idea of freedom*. The élan that starts the narration, the engine that fires up the performative idea of the piece has something to do with adolescence: it begins there. That is, it begins in the 'heat' of adolescence, a heat which isn't only existential or hormonal (although it is powerfully both of those things), but also a heat-haze of signification. *On the Road*, the novel, doesn't matter as a narrative – what *does* matter is that the novel, read at the age of fifteen, was 'the very idea of freedom'. So this is a revisitation of a literary love, and as such it smells of the time when it was read *in the first place*, and the *smell* of it matters. As if there were something about the revisitation of the literary love, and perhaps especially of the revisitation of the literary love which has its first place in adolescence, which forcefully

²⁹⁹ Lombardi, Franco, Marion D'Amburgo and Federico Tiezzi. *Sulla Strada dei Magazzini Criminali*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983. p. 75

brings about again, in hindsight, that ‘sensual ensemble’ of Fred Moten’s, constituting the very conceptual core of that first reading, ‘the very idea of freedom’. The smell of lilies in the hot night in Kerouac and the act of writing ‘I will love you forever’ on a motorway bridge are entities formed together, and as such they remain in memory together.

On the Road is a novel read by many people at fifteen, one of a handful of what Italian literature calls ‘generational novels’ meaning not only *bildungsroman*, but *bildungsroman* of a certain place and time. *On the Road* is a novel about America, read in Italy, and for Magazzini specifically, in the Tuscan countryside where they spent their teenage years. And *On the Road* is a classic, in Calvino’s terms – it constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of discourse around itself. In many instances Magazzini have written about the preservation of heat as a paradigm of their theatre, as a challenge: they strove to not ‘cool things down’ between thought and presentation, between text and stage, between rehearsal room and the presence of an audience, and it is in this logic that I have also spoken of their discography as ‘hot’ – *On the Road* as it is treated here is a literary object suited, then, to the company’s cause. It is, unsurprisingly, in the writings that frame *On the Road* that Tiezzi tells a very personal and very revealing origin story:

I was sitting on a beach (...): all of a sudden I catch the moment (the sun is setting) in which an infinitesimal diminution of light occurs. This is the strongest moment of my theatrical gaze, the moment I’ll reproduce ad infinitum (...).³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 103. I also want to note here that in the notes accompanying the script of *On the Road* in its published form, much of the tone is diaristic – Marion D’Amburgo publishes a long ‘diary’ (‘Diario di una Dama’, ‘Diary of a Dame’) within it, which mixes travelogue with philosophical musings and comments on events from her personal and literary life.

•

In the preface to his travelogue *Imagined Places: Journeys through literary America*, the (American) writer and journalist Michael Pearson writes that ‘the only places that didn’t have an ever-enticing hill right beyond them were those I’d dreamt up or read about in books. As Northrop Fyre has said, “No matter what direction we start off on, the signposts of literature keep pointing the same way, to a place where nothing is outside the human imagination” (...) I guess I wanted a world as filled with sound and fury as Faulkner’s... I wondered whether, if I stepped beyond the magical circle of imagining, these worlds would disappear like a mirage shimmering into memory’³⁰¹.

As Jean Baudrillard amply demonstrates in his own (extremely French) American travelogue, *America*, and as is demonstrated equally by any of the (again) French Symbolists and Decadentists travelling to North Africa (we shall return to North Africa), as is demonstrated in Pavese’s (aforementioned, extremely Italian) American writings both in his poems and in his diaries, or in Lorca’s works from his period in New York and in countless other works, *these* ‘imagined places’ (America and North Africa, notably) are made *irresistible*, or *irresistibly* seductive, by the fact that they *do* exist. Although they are other landscapes, other voices, unimaginably different from those found in Europe, they exist: you can go there, and you get to see for yourself. Other landscapes, other voices but not other planets – and here I think back to the correspondences, in *Crollo Nervoso*, between Vietnam and the moon; or to the evocation of a desert and deserted Africa in the year 2001. Marion

³⁰¹ Pearson, Michael. *Imagined Places: Journeys through literary America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000. p. xiii

D'Amburgo's 1981 text *Jang Quing* is a sort of manifesto of how she thinks about her theatre ('surface, zest, intermittence: desert-forms of passage, deserted geographies'³⁰²) followed by a 'dream' of the 'next glacial era' which concludes: 'it really is true, Africa isn't that far away...'³⁰³. These are the 'irresistible seductions' of Magazzini Criminali's, extremely European, even exoticising theatre: it is *irresistible* that 'objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear!'³⁰⁴ – the making close of an unfathomable distance is irresistible, the keeping hot of something cold, the ability to travel without waiting, getting there 'immediately' and 'forever', in space or indeed in time.

There is a relationship, then, between space and language which follows Magazzini Criminali through their years as Magazzini Criminali, another 'ping-pong of reifications' happening between these two poles. In *Sulla Strada* the fact that the 'exotic object' is America, and is America through the eyes of Kerouac, makes for the development of this relationship in a very particular form – a form which has to find another strategy for 'feeling

³⁰² D'Amburgo, Marion. *Jang Quing*. In Bonfiglioli, Rossella. *Frequenze Barbare. Musica, Cinema, Metropoli, Mass Media nei Magazzini Criminali Prod.* Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981. p. 215.

³⁰³ Ibid. Let me quote a little more of this passage of D'Amburgo's *Jang Quing*, which strikes me as a manifesto: 'I speak of motion as of the highest form of risk, existential risk which evades the terror of equilibrium. (...) From here, the choice, by seduction, of everything which is transparent: surface, zest, intermittence. All of the desert-forms of passage, deserted geographies. The sentimental correspondence with all forms of ubiquity is the most real of our romantic escapes. The ideological risk of violent disobedience no longer exists: it has been made redundant by the transparency of the real... So, more and more, at night, I dream, fascinated, of the next glacial era. I feel the wind blowing through our frozen cathedrals, the whales arriving on our shores. Lagos, Ryad, Rio, Timbuktu, Accra are full of refugees, all the caf  s, the beaches, the forests are overflowing with people... It really is true Africa isn't that far away.'

³⁰⁴ Compulsory warning on rearview mirrors in the US and Canada: it is the sentence which opens Jean Baudrillard's *America*. I can't help but think back to the tradition of the fantastical in French literature, inaugurated by certain Symbolists and continued perhaps most famously by certain Surrealists, in which the traversing of the mirror is an insistently reoccurring, conceptually charged, and narratively load bearing image. In these French literary traditions, the mirror is the *limen*, the (originally Greek) passage between the here and the *au del  * or the *ailleurs*, be it death, the dream, or some other 'other'. The warning on the mirror, in this conceptual context, is *irresistible*. The traversing of the mirror we shall see again later.

its object', a strategy which isn't the almost 'rhythmic' strategy of *Crollo Nervoso*. Much like Syxty, whose melancholia-laced, gas station-bound fantasy gets caught up in a game of soft breezes and cyclones, Magazzini have to 'feel' their America through the skin – breezes, temperatures, humidity. They cut up Kerouac's book:

Once we had cut all the mundane parts, with Marion we spent interminable nights underlining all the actions which took place outside, in the very body of nature, emulsifying the long distances, the growing feelings, the sunset, the boiling sentimentalism of the meetings, the nostalgia of loss, seduced by the violence and the passion of Kerouac, and ultimately also by our own.³⁰⁵

What remains of *On the Road* are some of its characters but not necessarily their characterisation; the voyage of the book is reduced to what I can only describe as the *idea* of a voyage, the *feeling* of travel and adventure, along with the sensual ensemble of the book: roses, lilies, sweat, cicadas, the hot night, the bright stars, the desert wind. Its 'coolness', in all senses, is scrapped. In reading *Sulla Strada* now, I find myself reading a text crafted almost solely out of sensual excesses; in watching it on video, I watch a stage which moves from dark green to yellow to pink, very slowly throbbing with droney African drums, with characters slowly repeating movements, hanging off ropes, producing their sentences with almost grinding pathos. The script of *Sulla Strada* can be read in less than half an hour; the performance is over three hours long. It is as if the whole piece were slicing through walls of hot air. So there is 'too much' language in *Sulla Strada*, but not because there are too many words – it is the fact that all the language pertains to a sensual economy that makes its

³⁰⁵ Lombardi, Franco, Marion D'Amburgo and Federico Tiezzi. *Sulla Strada dei Magazzini Criminali*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983. p. 78

scriptural economy heavy somehow, dripping, soaked.

Sal: We've let so many things pass us by!

Venezuela: Sal, I can no longer stand this damnation.

Sal: Let's take our clothes off.

Venezuela: Let's take our thoughts off.

Sal embraces Venezuela.

Sal: Your skin smells of roses.

Venezuela: You'll tell me your dreams tomorrow.

Sal: I love you. It took me so long to realise.

They keep walking.

Venezuela: Where are we?

Sal: In the heart of darkness of the world.

They embrace.

Venezuela: After us nobody.

Sal: After us the night.

They keep walking.

Kisses between theatre and territory? Sal and Venezuela embrace and kiss all the time. They move together, like fantastical creatures, adorned in animal skins, brandishing swords. And apart from and beyond this, yet still in relation to this, this kind of language interests me. Because it is a language which attempts, by way of sensual excesses, to reach what I can only refer to as a depth at the level of the epidermal (the notion of epidermal depth I shall return to in part III) which, in a sense, doesn't have its place in language but rather in something 'beyond' language, like a soft breeze or a cyclone. All the feeling, all the heat, all the atmosphere and all the scenography of *Sulla Strada* are in the very text of *Sulla Strada* and, indeed, in its pronunciation. Scale, pace and pattern are all in the language. It is language that does all the spectacular work, it is language itself that is inhabitable here – and this resonates

with European fantasies of America and has, I feel, something to do with scale, pace and pattern; especially with *scale*. There's a kind of American gigantic ever-present in Kerouac and in Magazzini's treatment of Kerouac: it regards a vastness language cannot portray and which hence gets 'translated' into a language of sensual excesses. An impossibility to measure with the eye made palpable through an insistence on the skin: it is language that will always fail to describe what it sees and resorts to descriptions of that which is experienced with every other sense. A void that swallows: a being-swallowed by the (empty) landscape which can only be rendered by a sort of *making-full*: 'the hot, savage, tropical world (...) the Mexican world of *Sulla Strada* must collapse for its collapsing characters'³⁰⁶. In his introduction to Baudrillard's English edition of *America*, Geoff Dyer writes that:

When Baudrillard discovers the 'fragment of another planet' that is Death Valley he is actually joining a procession of distinguished Europeans, including Michelangelo Antonioni (whose eponymous film climaxes at Zabriskie Point), and Michel Foucault who, in time honoured fashion, dropped acid there ('The sky had exploded and the stars are raining down upon me') (...) All of these Europeans are drawn to Death Valley, of course, partly because of the American cultural capital amassed and derived from there, most famously the photographs made by Edward Weston who was 'so shaky with excitement' when he first went there in 1937 that he had trouble setting up his camera. 'My God!' he kept saying 'it can't be!'³⁰⁷

My god, it can't be: just enough to undo what is in front of him, or rather just enough to attempt to describe Weston's feeling of *being undone* by what he is gazing upon. Weston

³⁰⁶ Lombardi, Franco, Marion D'Amburgo and Federico Tiezzi. *Sulla Strada dei Magazzini Criminali*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983. p. 75

³⁰⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Trans. Chris Turner, preface by Geoff Dyer. London: Verso, 2010. p. xi

produces a negation: it can't be. It is true that a climax takes place at Zabriskie point, but that climax is an imaginary explosion: seven minutes to blow up everything which is comprehensible and domestic, including furniture, clothing, and a very long shot of books, followed by a drive into the night in a rusty Buick, the long lingering shot of an impossibly red sunset. Antonioni, also, has been *undone*. There is a tradition of Europeans for whom America (or the concept of America, or the fantasy of America) *undoes* language – not what Baudrillard calls 'cultural America' (the America of *Gas Station*, which undoes by different means) but what Baudrillard refers to as 'astral America'³⁰⁸. While Kerouac's book negotiates between these two Americas (whether we agree with the distinction put in place by Baudrillard or not), Magazzini preserve only its astral moments – this is what I intercept as their challenge: to reify, to give body to the astral, not to the cultural (which probably pertained to 'all the mundane parts'). A challenge which chimes in tune with the challenge of keeping hot, a will which resonates with a desire to *mettre en scène* the unmeasurable:

There is (...) a whole universe which puts in place distances and separations: between a thinking subject and an object of study, between the hot time of thought and the cold *a posteriori* time of its exhibition, separated by an interval in which a cooling happens, a measuring of distances, creating an elsewhere space of elaboration, an exit from the room previously traversed in heat. This practice determines the coordinates of the activity of theory as cold zones. Let us postulate instead our theoretical moment as 'hot zones', and make it circulate stripped of all those cooling systems.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Ibid. p xii

³⁰⁹ Magazzini Criminali Production. Magazzini Criminali # 5 (magazine), entitled *Caldo Caldo Tropicale*. p. 1. 'Hot Zones', *Zone Calde*, is also the name of a 1981 performance put on by Magazzini Criminali in collaboration with Mendini, built around Mendini's 'Infinite Furniture' designs and performed in the courtyard of the academy of architecture in Milan.

•

The cool turns hot, the empty turns full. ‘Immense geological silences’³¹⁰ become amassed with words, smothered in adjectives. If, as Doreen Massey has observed, Eurocentric narratives of the other have historically relied on the subjugation implicit in the scriptural economy of the Renaissance³¹¹ in order to order and control – a movement whereby language serves the purpose of building a fence around orality and aurality, in which of the practice of graphing (sometimes literally) *draws confines*³¹² – here, four-hundred or so years later, we find a Eurocentric narrative of the other which (similarly to Magazzini’s Eurocentric Africa) rather than desiring to subjugate a vastness by way of description, finds itself attempting to make present its *own* subjugation to that vastness and finds that words do not suffice. In fact, it chooses to make those words ring out at the *theatre*. *Sulla Strada* has dances, music, scenography, but what it is especially made up of is pronunciation, as if it were the inside of the mouth itself which wanted to give body to these words beyond body. The scenography concurs in this effect because it dwarfs the human bodies: all the script makes up for the vastness by being guttural and slow, the gestures are repetitive, sculptural, strong arms with machetes drawing curves into the fuzzy pink lighting.

It isn’t new. A certain affiliation holds together what Marion D’Amburgo describes as

³¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Trans. Chris Turner, preface by Geoff Dyer. London: Verso, 2010. p. xi

³¹¹ Rabasa, José, quoted by Doreen Massey in *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005. p. 120

³¹² Sketching out the discourse which moves from de Certeau’s writings on the explorer Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1578) and José Rabasa’s critique of de Certeau, Massey emphasises the concept of the ‘blank page’, concentrating on ‘blank page’ as an expression: the blank page has to do with orality versus ‘the scriptural economy of the Renaissance’, with the practice of writing reducing the ‘conquered’ to savages and also building a fence around the oral, and hence, Massey concludes, around space. Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005. pp. 119, 120

‘all her literary loves’³¹³: a line connects the Symbolists and the Beats (and, quite singularly, runs into Jean Genet, who is unsurprisingly another great literary love of the company’s) and it is the line of the damned, the line of the decadent, the line which describes, like an orbit around a planet, a practice of writing in ‘decoration’, a practice of embroidery, of description of the sensual provoked by something more than a description of the thing in itself. This line is also a line of sex, drugs and if not rock ‘n’ roll then other all-consuming (more consuming, even) passions – a whole line of nights in Tunisia³¹⁴. Truly marginal, then: *around* in order to give description to the *within*, orbital to the planet, peripheral to the centre and ever-dwelling in the ‘sides’ of experience, in the atmosphere and in the senses, in that in-between which reveals itself as everywhere. A sort of horror vacui, which is always a horror and at the same time a fascination with the void: sensual description in Magazzini’s *Sulla Strada* and in their literary loves – who are also, by way of love, their literary ancestors – takes on the (impossible?) challenge of gathering in fullness in order to expose a void. Mendini’s writings on decoration ring out here: if it is true, as Mendini asserts, that ‘intimately we are solitary’ and that hence we can only still communicate ‘on the level of the skin’, decoration shows its (postmodern) face in turning from practice of adornment to a practice of last resort, in architecture as it does in language – a practice of riding into the sunset. Perhaps on that beach where an infinitesimal diminution of light occurred, the ‘strongest moment’ of Tiezzi’s

³¹³ Marion D’Amburgo spoke of all her literary loves being ‘inside’ *Sulla Strada* in a letter sent to me in late 2011, but there is evidence of these literary loves everywhere in her own writings about performance.

³¹⁴ The line from Dizzy Gillespie’s 1942 *Night in Tunisia* goes: *The stars are aglow in the heavens / But only the wise understand / That shining at night in Tunisia / They guide you through the desert sand / Words fail, to tell a tale / Too exotic to be told / Each night's a deeper night / In a world, ages old*. Kerouac reportedly (reported by Ginsberg) ‘cut his teeth’ on this, but it seems fair to me to say that in one way or another all the artists I am summoning in this chapter gather their rosebuds in this kind of concept, and repeat it, again: *words fail to tell a tale too exotic to be told...*

theatrical gaze, a moment to reproduce ad infinitum.³¹⁵

Venezuela: But who is it who wants to die?

Sal: Who wants to die?

Venezuela: Let's meet in Atlantis.

Sal: Ah! More contraband stories!

Venezuela: At the elephant temple.

Sal: And what shall we do with the virus?

Venezuela: Let's throw it into the city's water mains.

Sal: Mmmm. And then everything will go boom!

Venezuela: Boom boom! Come, let's change zone. Soon it'll get too hot here.

Sal: Don't tell me the lights are shining! We have the heat, we mustn't let it go.

Venezuela: We mustn't let it go. Look at all the stars. And when we die all these stars will go out, one by one.

Sal: And nobody, nobody knows what will happen.

³¹⁵ Lombardi, Franco, Marion D'Amburgo and Federico Tiezzi. *Sulla Strada dei Magazzini Criminali*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983. p. 103

Blue Fugues:

Spatialisation and Fugue La Gaia Scienza

A movement the Neo-Spectacular theatre consistently performs – and it does so also in its development of the notion of metropolitan – is the act of dwelling long enough in dusts, in diffusions, in holographic postcards (tilting of angles, trompe-l'oeil, venetian blinds... let us recall those 'shapes') that a certain kind of force is exposed in those 'airy nothings', that a discourse is formed out of them, that – perhaps – even a set of 'alternatives' is crafted. I wrote, some pages back, about an idea of 'repowering the in-between', or about a desire (my desire) to do such a thing. The kind of motions described so far can be seen to attest to a will to work on the airy fabric of things, including those parts of the fabric which may appear useless or ungenerative, in order to carve out other designs, other stances, made out of another kind of substance. The city is an architectural space: the fact that at the heart of these reflections lies an idea of built environment is a fact easily forgotten in the name of seeing cities as loci of intense diffusion and circulation of ideas, images, sensibilities. In Rome-based group La Gaia Scienza's theatre there is an attention to the structures governing the built in which the aesthetic most forcefully reveals its political possibilities: La Gaia Scienza are perhaps the group whose work comes closest than any of the Neo-Spectacular companies to a metropolitan 'reification'.

Before switching angles between an attention to space and an attention to image in the movements determining a weave of space and image sustained by the paradigm of inhabitability, I want to propose a reflection on La Gaia Scienza's work because it offers one more, different, declination of the concept of metropolitan. A declination which is perhaps its most extreme: the philosophical structures which make the idea of metropolitan landscape in a

sense ‘lose their images’ in La Gaia Scienza to show themselves as purely structures. Looking at La Gaia Scienza’s work now also allows me to prepare for the discussions occupying much of part III, in which I hope to make present how a progressive reduction and concentration (those words again) takes place, from the visual to the structures keeping the visual together. More and more this work will reach into the depths of how mechanisms are formed, triggered, interfered with and understood. Because while this theatre, all of this theatre, can be inscribed into a canon of ‘the visual’, what reveals itself over time as the core of Neo-Spectacular work is the search not for images, but for the languages of images; for their ‘grammar’, which is also to say their productive limits.

Oliviero Ponte di Pino’s use of the word ‘grammar’ in his evocation of ‘a grammar of the present’ constructed in the ‘obsolete medium of the theatre’³¹⁶ is something I again want to hold close here: the notion of the theatre as truly experimental space, not because a ‘here’ can become an ‘elsewhere’, but – as I have reiterated at various points throughout this thesis – the here remains the here, but a here into which we have breathed an elsewhere. The notion of the metropolitan always possesses a sense of *using* the city ‘as if everything hadn’t been decided’: the city in flux, the city in a state of becoming, opens up the possibility that the city is a space which can still be altered, which can be not only inscribed onto or dreamt into but effectively transformed through the lives that take place there, one of which is the life of the theatre.

My reader will recall that our initial encounter with La Gaia Scienza took place in the movement of this investigation entitled *To the Rooftops, to the Beach*. Here, I evoked their performance of that movement from the basement to the rooftop which, as we have seen,

³¹⁶ Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988

becomes a powerful, emblematic and very ‘real’ metaphor carrying the idea of the metropolitan as a whole. I want to begin by revisiting that movement from the basement to the rooftop, that night at the theatre, through the writing of others. I add here another two nights at the theatre as described by other commentators, spectators and critics. Three nights at the theatre which, by way of minimal brushstrokes, let us into the pace, the pattern and the tone of La Gaia Scienza’s work:

The first night is the night of 17th December 1977. The performance is called *Una Notte sui Tetti* (‘A Night on the Rooftops’). The place is the rooftop of an apartment block on Via Flaminia, in Rome. A young man and a young woman chase each other across the rooftops – the audience is barely able to keep up with them³¹⁷. The roofs have been adorned with two or three striplights, and there are TV aerials, chimneys, it’s a cold night. They slip in and out of view, it ‘feels dangerous’³¹⁸; the neon-lit roofs look like ‘an upside down-sky’³¹⁹. One performer cries: *the situation is grave! Loss of gravity!*³²⁰

The second night is the night of 4th February 1978. The performance is called *Blu Oltremare* (‘Ultramarine Blue’). The place is the Teatro Bibiena in Mantua, an 18th century opera house. Four figures walk around a room upstairs from the main theatre, in the dark. They have drawn a series of concentric squares on the floor, which they progressively dance their way out of, one square at a time. In the outermost square, they have positioned a light-bulb in front of a large mirror, functioning as ‘the outside’ of the performance. Having reached that outside, they open every window and every curtain in the room: the lighting from

³¹⁷ Moscati, Italo. ‘L’Avanguardia va Sui Tetti’ Published in *L’Europeo*, 17th February 1978.

³¹⁸ Manacorda, Giorgio. ‘A Roma lo Spettro del Teatro.’ Published in *La Stampa*, 7th January 1978, republished in *Bollettino Beat*, no. 3, 1978. p. 23

³¹⁹ Bargiacchi, Enzo. ‘Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza’ In *Teatroltre / Scrittura Scenica* no. 22, 1980. pp. 48-71. p. 57.

³²⁰ Ibid.

the street and the sound of isolated cars in Mantua's cold and sleepy city centre invades the playing space³²¹.

The third night is the night of 13th April 1978. The performance is called *Sogni Proibiti* ('Forbidden Dreams'). The place is the deconsecrated church of San Carpofo, in the Milanese district of Brera, which now houses the visual arts department of the Brera Academy of Fine Arts. Four young figures leap in from the left side of the building, run into and away from each other, occupy the space which is 'so vast this time, it needs no conceptual dilatations'³²². There are elastic ropes and lights which fall and swing unexpectedly from the ceiling. The room is lit intermittently by the light of an ambulance parked outside the door, which is ajar, sweeping the space rhythmically with blue light. The performers try to leave the building via the windows, attempting an impossible walk up the walls, although, of course, the door is open³²³.

•

I spent some days in Rome between the apartments of Marco Solari (that same Via Flaminia apartment) and Alessandra Vanzì. I arrived at these apartments having read many descriptions like the ones above, having seen many photographs and much documentation of

³²¹ Artioli, Umberto. 'Il "mentale" e il "vitale"' (talk: Mantua, 25th February 1978). Published in *Pertinenze e Impertinenze Teatrali e Non*. Mantua: Circolo Ottobre, 1978.

³²² Bargiacchi, Enzo. 'Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza.' In *Teatroltre / Scrittura Scenica* no. 22, 1980. pp. 48-71. p. 57.

³²³ 'Ingenua Avanguardia di Un Gruppo Romano', anonymous review of *Sogni Proibiti* published on *Il Giornale*, 15th April 1978; see also 'Sbadigli con L'Ultima Avanguardia', published in *L'Avvenire*, 15th April 1978. Bad reviews of *Sogni Proibiti* which nevertheless describe the show.

the work that followed (notably Giorgio Barberio Corsetti's work³²⁴) and even some of their work as a group: I arrived with hours' worth of questions. Yet I also arrived without an 'imagination' of the work – although I had, for example, seen *Cuori Strappati* (1983), and although the various descriptions of the piece differed little – as descriptions – from a whole host of other work, I was unable to 'project' my impressions of *Cuori Strappati* onto other works to try and imagine what they looked like because, I realised, I couldn't *really* understand *where Cuori Strappati* came from. I didn't really 'get' La Gaia Scienza. Then, when we met, I found Solari and Vanzi extremely familiar. Which meant that it quickly became very easy to talk. I was eager to talk, especially about what I didn't 'get'; so I wanted to talk about the concept of 'lightness', a concept which hardly ever makes its way into the work of other companies, but which with La Gaia Scienza is pervasive. In the company's writings, in the writing about their work by critics and in the theatre per se, as I watch it on video thirty years later or as it is recounted to me or shown to me in photographs, the mention of 'lightness' is inescapable. Amongst my first questions to Marco Solari was, what were you listening to?

Even when the groups didn't make records, I find that I can talk about the work as if I were talking about records. I can talk to myself about the theatre as I do about musical genres somehow, about palettes of sound, transposing the visual reality of the work onto imaginary aural counterparts. It is an affective historiographical method, a way to run my fingers through clues, but it is also offered by the work itself – by its visual aspects, its atmospherical quotients, and its 'scene'. I ask my interviewees what they were listening to because it tells

³²⁴ Because after the group's split in 1984, Barberio Corsetti went on to work extensively with Milan-based video group Studio Azzurro, the works he made in that period (roughly 1984 - 1987) are very well documented. Giorgio Barberio Corsetti's voice is largely absent from this narration because he unfortunately has been unable to meet me and we haven't, over the course of this research, exchanged any form of correspondence.

me something they may not be able to tell me in words. Sometimes, of course – often, really – I even get to listen to the records of the companies themselves³²⁵. But there is much more apart from that: Antonio Syxty, either in his shows or in directing video-clips for other artists, worked with La Masque, Franco Battiato, Matia Bazar, Maurizio Marsico – all musicians of Italian ‘postmodern’ new wave, and I can listen to their work. I can listen to ‘Americanist’ teenage music from the time, imagine the sound of the ‘Antonio Syxty Fan Cub’, which we will turn our attention to in a while. Jon Hassell’s later scores for Magazzini are available to listen to; the American band Tuxedomoon (also responsible for some beautiful Neo-Spectacular works of their own) gave La Gaia Scienza’s *Cuori Strappati* a long and glorious version of a song which four years later became their only major hit, *In a Manner of Speaking*.

Even when we can’t listen to the shows I find we can listen, that is, to the sonic manifestations of the cultural world a theatre maker inhabited, and this does something to the historiographical work. It supplies those hot surfaces I spoke of regarding *Crollo Nervoso*, it keeps things alive, it keeps us dancing – and a lot of affective information is there. If Magazzini sound like themselves (like violent new wave interspersed with dark yet frivolous moments, shouting words in Spanish over Brian Eno’s stolen bootlegs), and Syxty sounds like a melancholy beach-score between 1960s Italian pop and cosmic disco, and Societàs Raffaello Sanzio sound like Byzantine goth-punk, and Falso Movimento sound like saxophones and

³²⁵ Though none of the records repeat the experience of Magazzini Criminali’s ‘musicals’, there is a lot of audio archive of the New Spectacularity. Some of Barberio Corsetti’s post-Gaia Scienza works are released on record, one later performance of Solari/Vanzi’s appeared on LP in 1986, there is a tape of Maurizio Marsico’s soundtrack for Taroni / Cividin’s *As Diamond Clearness*, recordings of soundtracks by various musicians for Antonio Syxty, the record *Eneide* by Litfiba made for Krypton’s 1982 *Eneide* as well as various other bits and pieces which could match and could also not match. These records all tell us ‘something’.

tango, La Gaia Scienza have something dream pop about them. Nobody else does: the rest is all harder, darker, heavier.

La Gaia Scienza were listening, Marco Solari informs me, to a lot of 1960s American music, ‘when nobody went to clubs... then we started listening to new wave, because we started going to clubs. I don’t know why we started going to clubs. Everyone started going to clubs. It was this American thing...’³²⁶. ‘This American thing’ is very interesting to me, because the American ‘thing’ we have seen declined – so differently – in the work of Syxty and Magazzini, has yet another iteration in La Gaia Scienza. The ‘club thing’ which Solari described to me intersects, in the company’s work, with what Solari in an interview with Ponte di Pino in ’88 (and then in an interview with me when I enquired about this in 2012) called ‘the American lesson, from John Cage’ which Solari describes as ‘the will to reach the zero’³²⁷. Something which, as we discussed in Rome, has something to do with serialism, and with minimalism: it has to do with a propensity towards form. This cocktail of American ‘things’ – the lascivious air of the times (and especially of the night-times) on the one hand, and the rigour of the American ‘lesson’ on the other – allow us to see a part of the picture, an atom of tone of the company’s work. I insist here on the concept of America but of course it is one element of a much larger, more complex vocabulary, and not as principal a concept in the work of La Gaia Scienza as it is in Syxty, for example – nevertheless it is interesting, in our gallery of American influences (which after all matter for a theatre recently referred to as ‘Wilson-type works’³²⁸) to see what *this* set of American influences looks like.

³²⁶ Marco Solari interviewed by myself, Rome, 2012.

³²⁷ Marco Solari and Alessandra Vanzi are interviewed by Oliviero Ponte di Pino in Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988

³²⁸ ‘Robert Wilson type works became so important a part of the Italian experimental scene as to be considered a new genre, the ‘Nuova Spettacolarità’ or (‘New Spectacularity’) or ‘Media Theatre’. Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996 and 2013. p. 110

The theatre of La Gaia Scienza is all ‘jumps, leaps, runs’. There is a recurring presence of the colour blue, there is an abundance of pastel colours in lights, dress and set, there is an attention to domestic, organic objects and materials, such as powders, marbles, glass. And there is an enormous attention to the built environment³²⁹. When this attention does not – as is the case in the three nights at the theatre described earlier – manifest itself as interaction with the existing built environment, these interactions are transferred to scenography. *Gli Insetti Preferiscono le Ortiche* (‘Insects Prefer Nettles’, 1982), for example, features a scaffold cube covered in lanterns, a rubber slope, a wall made out of strips of fabric, all of which allow the performers to transform, melt, subvert the relationships between the body and its setting. *Cuori Strappati* (‘Torn Hearts’, 1983) takes place on a moving set made up of steps, ladders, bridges, buildings with windows, collapsable walls, *trompe l’oeil* vanishing points. *Turchese* (‘Turquoise’, 1981) has a large metal shard at its centre, which interrupts the view of the performers ‘flying’ (by running fast as a group of three) and the projected images of the sea in the background (*Turchese* is an adventure in space, a science-fiction piece, described

³²⁹ There is something of a triangulation which occurs between La Gaia Scienza’s theatre and its impulses and intentions, the built environment (specifically of a visibly stratified city like Rome, which because it is so ‘stratified’ is extremely open to being thought in its transformations) and the New Spectacularity as a generation of theatre-makers. P.A. Skantze, à propos Martone’s work in 2004 at Teatro India, writes a passage which resounds here: ‘Martone coaxed a narrative from the structure [of Teatro India] (...) many different directors and performers seemed to take inventive inspiration from the space, the building of the theatre offering aesthetic, ethical and moral invitations to a nomadic citizenry, as well as a more pointed invitation to the local theatre-goers to “hear” the building as a structure of malleable possibility’. I am struck by the fact that what Skantze describes is very much the aesthetic, ethical and moral invitation La Gaia Scienza’s work accepts and poses, and that Skantze makes these comments with regard to Martone (who ‘was born with’ and ‘gave birth to’ Falso Movimento and their cinema in two dimensions), with regard to spectating in Rome, and with regard to Teatro India (which Martone himself named with its evocative place-name, and which, located in the ex-Mira Lanza soap and candle factory, offers in itself a ‘rethinking of the city’ of a post-Nicolinian kind, a late 1990s declination of that ‘urban marvellous’ and ‘metropolitan ephemeral’ which La Gaia Scienza’s work was so integral to). Skantze, P.A. *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*. New York: Punctum, 2013. p. 158

knowingly and tellingly by Silvana Sinisi as, in fact, a 'kleine Welt'³³⁰). Despite the briefness of these descriptions, we can already see – in these three pieces and in the three evoked above – six of the company's pieces in which the transformation of space, of its limits, of its contours, of its laws of gravity is paramount. The documents (visual of otherwise) of other performances by La Gaia Scienza tell us of similar scenarios: the dedication to a transformation of 'real' space and the physical vocabulary of the run, the jump, the leap, occur in each of their works, and most notably in those from '78-'84.

In my time with Marco Solari and Alessandra Vanzi it became very clear, very quickly, that if we were to talk about this lightness we were to talk about politics. Here is another movement in two turns, another movement anti-movement, another apparent contradiction or soft subversion: La Gaia Scienza, the group whose political involvement in the everyday is absolutely the most direct, whose members were actively involved in the '77 Movement, who were on the street clashing 'either with the police or with the fascists' on an almost daily basis³³¹, the group whose members, more than any of the other Neo-Spectacular theatre makers, banged their heads against the hard reality of what we have seen Palandri describe as 'the most tragic epilogue of the 1970s'³³² flood their theatre with pink, with turquoise, with marbles, ropes, ladders, sand. Not with venetian blinds, television sets, guns and sunglasses,

³³⁰ 'A 'dance piece, with a rock music score, devised from three geometric forms – the line, the triangle, the circle – in which the choreographic action visualises the energetic density of the sonorous flux expanding in the environment through a series of passages, variations and fugues which occupy the dynamics of the body in a breathless crescendo (...) the actions culminate with the three throwing themselves into a heap of white powder, from which they emerge as if from a rebirth' (Sinisi, Silvana. *Dalla Parte dell'Occhio: Esperienze Teatrali in Italia 1972-1983*. Rome: Kappa, 1983. p. 177-178) Sinisi also notes how in Turchese 'even the anguishing universe of science fiction (...) is reduced to a domestic and playful dimension, to the Kleine Welt of a childlike game' (Sinisi, Silvana. 'Kleine Welt in Turchese' in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 220)

³³¹ This is from a (much longer, much more detailed) conversation with Alessandra Vanzi, Rome, April 2012.

³³² Palandri, Enrico. *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2005. p. 19

the incessantly present stage objects of the Neo-Spectacular. Except in one instance: there is, in the archive of La Gaia Scienza, a gun made out of balsa wood, used in the 1980 piece *Ensemble*. Solari explained to me that they didn't want to use replica guns and they didn't want to use toy guns – they wanted the fact of holding the gun to actively have an effect on their movements; a desire to 'feel' the gun, so to speak. Balsa wood is the lightest wood available in nature; these feather-light submachines were made by La Gaia Scienza's collaborator Adriano Vecchiotti: weight in negative. The audience 'knew and didn't know... I think at times they realised our guns were as light as feathers. But for us it was important that they weighed next to nothing. It was a killing game, a massacre... but it was also a reflection on clandestinity. There, this is the one object I would choose to synthesise La Gaia Scienza, the one symbol I would choose to represent all of our work as a company: the gun made out of balsa wood'. I asked what they did on stage with these guns, how they effectively deployed them – Solari laughed and replied 'ci rincorrevamo... salti, corsette... il solito!'³³³.

•

'Il solito'. The question is again the question I asked – about *clandestinity* – as I introduced La Gaia Scienza the first time, a question regarding losses and gains – if there are gains to be gained at all. I repeat my questions from earlier: what is lost, aesthetically, politically, in travelling from the basement to the rooftop, and what, if anything, is gained? What is lost, to remain true to our example, in the passage from reciting Mayakovsky underground to reciting Rilke on the roof? I cue up some others: what does lightness yield –

³³³ 'We used to run after each other... jumps, runs... the usual!' Marco Solari interviewed by myself, Rome, April 2012.

does it have *strength*? Or is it just weak, because it's delicate, because it's airy, because it's *klein*? Is pink a watered down form of red? How does turquoise speak back to our predominant electric blue? And the balsa wood – is it pacificism, passivism, or what? Has any of this got anything to do with everything that Italy was becoming? And I repeat – is there anything to be 'gained' here?

I am not alone in insisting on this idea of the jump, the leap, the run. I'm not alone because this was indeed 'il solito', and as such many before me, in fact almost every voice in the host of critics of the New Spectacularity (Lorenzo Mango, Silvana Sinisi, Carlo Infante, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, Achille Bargiacchi and others) has asked why that may be. Even the name of the group – The Gay Science – asks us to insist on this matter. As Nietzsche himself chose to explain in his preface to his 1887 edition of the book, “‘Gay Science’ indicates the saturnalia of a spirit, which has resisted with patience to a long and horrible oppression, – with patience, with hardness, with coldness, without accepting to be defeated and yet without hope, – and that now, all of a sudden, is invaded by hope, by the hope for health, by the inebriation of convalescence”³³⁴. Nietzsche's text here matters to La Gaia Scienza and matters to a study of the company's work – as do many texts used or more often 'cited' by the New Spectacularity, such as Kerouac's book – not in terms of what it writes *of*, but in terms of what it writes *with*: in this case, the fascination with the 'Provençal's dancing above morality'³³⁵ as an expression of 'joyful wisdom'³³⁶, something like an uncontainable-yet-knowing joie de vivre. This fascination, this tonal residue is visible in the work of La Gaia Scienza; it is a tonal

³³⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974. p. 32

³³⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1979. p. 68

³³⁶ Ibid.

residue which matters to us, after our fireflies, in a number of ways – joyful wisdoms, unhappy consciousnesses, dances above morality, in the dark.

I am also not alone in intercepting in these movements – these circles, these flights, this running across, between, jump, return, leap, come back again – an idea of fugue. These movements look – and indeed *sound* – like fugues; like something that goes and comes back, something that goes and returns, something which ‘expresses the urge to explore the world by frolicking’³³⁷ – both *fugere* and *fugare*³³⁸, a fugue escapes and chases at the same time³³⁹. Achille Mango had observed in 1978 that the actor in La Gaia Scienza ‘proposes his own exit from the world and immediately points to the impossibility [of that exit]; the actor presents himself as object and runs towards regaining his own humanity’³⁴⁰. Lorenzo Mango has also singled out in the fugue the motif of La Gaia Scienza’s work:

the writing of the fugue becomes the story of the fugues which manifest themselves in the performances. *La Rivolta degli Oggetti* in which the fugue delineates itself as paths of light... the dream is to fly the damnation is to think... *Cronache Marziane* in which the fugue is seen as vain act and gesture of war... *Una Notte sui Tetti* in which the fugue is sentimental tension... (...) *Turchese* in which the fugue is primordial biology... *Cuori Strappati* in which the fugue is an imaginary path... *Notturmi Diamanti* in which the fugue is from love.³⁴¹

³³⁷ Kathleen Marie Higgins writes about Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* as a text which ‘expresses the urge to dance, to explore the world by frolicking’ in Higgins, Kathleen Marie. *Comic Relief: Nietzsche’s Gay Science*. Oxford: OUP, 2000. p. 172.

³³⁸ *Fugere* and *fugare* run after each other for centuries before being absorbed by each other in the detours of modern languages: *fugere* is to flee and *fugare* is to put to flight.

³³⁹ The fugue is also the geometrical and rhythmic basis of many folk dances, and this is also interesting. La Gaia Scienza’s pieces ‘look like’ a kind of American New Dance and are at the same time, in a sense, the most closely bound (perhaps unwittingly) to ‘provincial’ folk traditions. Moreover, they mostly take place in Rome, so as close to an idea of metropolis as we can possibly get in Italy. Perhaps the less ‘narrative’ a dance gets, the closer its (re?)turns to folk.

³⁴⁰ Mango, Achille. *Verso una Sociologia del Teatro*. Trapani: Celebes, 1978. p. 68

³⁴¹ Mango, Lorenzo quoted in Bargiacchi, Enzo. ‘Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza.’ In *Teatroltre / Scrittura Scenica* no. 22, 1980. pp. 48-71.

Italian, though, urges us to be careful about the word fugue. Having lost, via vocalic shifts, the Latin distinction between *fugere* and *fugare*, ‘fuga’ is, in Italian, a fugue and *also* an escape. This last fugue of Mango’s – *from* love – shines a torch straight into that shift, into that assimilation of vowels. Most Italian criticism which deals with fugue in La Gaia Scienza has, it seems to me, dwelled in that shift, a shift which is interesting because it supplies a movement *and* blows its sentimental energy into it at the same time.

Here though, I am more interested in studying the logic of the fugue in its mechanics – in what the movement of the fugue *does* in La Gaia Scienza’s work. It is flight, yes; it is an offering and taking back; it is a picking up and letting go again; but it is also and especially a structural method, a tool, a mode of composition. The geometry of the fugue draws out a trajectory which is more than just an escape, more than a road to travel in order to exit. The return implicit in the notion of fugue interests me in La Gaia Scienza, the thrill of the chase, and not only of the escape; the impossibility of running out without running back, and the impossibility of leaving because a trace or track is sketched out in space by the very act of travelling outwards. La Gaia Scienza’s work seems to insist so deeply on the transformation of space that its *narrative* movement seems to matter little in comparison to the movement of the *making* of the image – and of the making of its processes of inhabitation – which seem to carry something more important in this theatre. In the company’s work a torchlight is constantly pointed at the infrastructure, the rhythm, the make-up of a system which regards space. Inhabitation, and the idea of the inhabitable image, is always accompanied by that background buzz of escapism, by that nostalgic twang we have seen in so much of this work – and I am in no way asserting that that sentiment isn’t buzzing in the background here, that

melancholy unreal imperfect. But there is also, and I suggest especially, something else here – another kind of relationship with *grammar*.

- *Cosa pensi della morte?*
- *E' come la fine di uno spettacolo.*
- *Apro la porta e me ne vado.*³⁴²

•

In a classic 1958 musicological treaty entitled *The Study of Fugue*, Alfred Mann quotes Manfred Bukowzer who defines the fugue, in music, as ‘neither a form nor a texture but a contrapunctual procedure’³⁴³. As what Mann calls ‘the essence of polyphony’³⁴⁴, the fugue, he argues, is impossible to encapsulate in a definition, for it makes use of many strategies for what is mostly what I want to call an ‘infrastructural’ kind of movement³⁴⁵. Fugue is mostly, as Mann states, *procedure* – not form, not texture. Fugue is a methodology, then: in as much as it is the set of movements and structures governing the formation of an idea, of a language, indeed of a grammar. Fugue is a type of dramaturgy – maybe we can say that fugue is an *apparatus* in line with Agamben’s synthesised definition developed from de Certeau – I quote:

1. a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and non linguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on. The apparatus itself is

³⁴² - ‘What do you think about death?’ - ‘It’s like the end of a show.’ - ‘I open the door and I leave’. From La Gaia Scienza’s *Gli Insetti Preferiscono le Ortiche*, 1982.

³⁴³ Mann, Alfred. *The Study of Fugue*. New York: Norton, 1987 (1958). p. 7

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 7

³⁴⁵ I return to the notion of infrastructure as expressed and qualified in Part I of this thesis: I am thinking of Agamben, but I am also thinking of rail networks and motorways.

the network that is established between these elements. 2. The apparatus always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation. 3. As such, it appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge.³⁴⁶

What I'm interested in and what I want to propose here is that La Gaia Scienza's sentimental runs, jumps, leaps which incessantly take place in their performances can reveal themselves as something more politically and philosophically muscular than they may originally have appeared. The fugue is, perhaps, the *procedure* which allows La Gaia Scienza's insistence on a vocabulary of lightness to be logically conjugated with the group's political ideology; if we view the fugue as an apparatus, then a re-structuring is going on, a re-structuring which undoes contradiction by substituting one structure with another structure: in this world, lightness becomes a political tool.

Let us return to John Cage's 'lesson' and to the search for the zero – because it is a lesson political in spirit, and political in the register of the 'refoundational': John Cage's *emptying out* of musical content occurs when, I quote Cage, 'our proper work now if we love mankind and the world we live in, is revolution'³⁴⁷. The alteration and transformation not of images in La Gaia Scienza (nor of music, as such, in John Cage) but rather of the structure, of the scaffolding, of the medium itself, of the apparatus of theatrical space seems to be the main concern in the theatre of La Gaia Scienza: modifications of scale, pace, pattern. In effect, La Gaia Scienza's theatre appears as solely *scale*, *pace*, and *pattern*, and this probably has something to do with its appearance as light, airy and youthful. I suggest it might be not that the theatre *was* airy and light, but that its *appearance* as airy and light may have been

³⁴⁶ Agamben, Giorgio. *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009. pp. 2-3.

³⁴⁷ Cage, John. *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1979. p. xi.

determined by its purely ‘apparatical’ concerns – something we find more often in dance than in theatre (and here American lessons flourish).

It is interesting to note how a number of the company’s reviews from the time speak of not remembering ‘what happened’, or not being able to say what could be seen on stage – then they go on to describe an atmosphere. Perhaps this is also why I found it so hard to ‘see’ the group’s theatre. In effect, there is nothing to see in La Gaia Scienza’s theatre. For a group operating within a wave very much known for its *visuality* there is a distinct *lack of images*. It is theatre that feeds the spectator very little in terms of symbolic accumulation. What it feeds the spectator is spaces: spaces and demonstrations of their transformation. *These* are the images.

•

Fredric Jameson offers the view, in discussing the work of Robert Gober – in what I would like to treat as as Gober’s attention to scale, pace and pattern – that it is in practices that deal with *spatialisation* in the postmodern era that we find surviving traces of the utopian thinking which existed so prominently in the modernist project:

Spatialization, then, whatever it may take away in the capacity to think time and History, also *opens a door* onto a whole new domain for libidinal investment of the Utopian and even the protopolitical type. (...) the postmodern now suggests an additional possibility, something like a third reading, in which the conception of a Utopian anticipation is foregrounded in a theoretical, *non-figurative* way (...) It can be seen (...) not so much as the production of some

form of Utopian space, but rather as the production of the *concept* of such space.³⁴⁸

The spectatorial relationship established with the spaces deconstructed and re-constructed in the works of La Gaia Scienza is one which, devoid of images or ‘image-objects’, is no longer exactly *visual* – or if it is, it is only so if it is inserted into a paradigm of inhabitability: spaces are cued in to play an active role not as backdrop, but as visually unbound *environment*, in a continuous stretching out of sight-lines, as in the case of Rome from the rooftops of Via Flaminia as upside-down sky or of Mantua appearing through the windows in *Blu Oltremare*: the very concept of *oltre-mare*, of *ultra-marine*, of *over-seas* contains an inebriation with the (impossible, but attemptable) stretching of space.

An inebriation with the reinvention, refoundation, radical transformation of space and its logic does not, of course, make for ‘political theatre’ per se – as Jameson also reminds us, ‘utopian visions are not yet themselves a politics’³⁴⁹. No, not *yet*. However, as modifiers of scale, pace and pattern, utopian visions make present the shadow of a politics by being in themselves examples of political thinking, by being *things that think politically*. Furthermore in the space of the theatre, while Utopian visions are still not a politics, they are also not

³⁴⁸ Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke, 1991. pp. 164-165. I would like to add here that Robert Gober’s spatialising movements of the 1980s find, I believe, counterparts (even antecedents) in the Italian *arte povera* production of the 1970s, notably in the work of Kounellis, Pistoletto and Penone. There is a web of resonances between Jameson’s reflections on Gober, La Gaia Scienza and *arte povera* perhaps, possible to draw out following the alteration of space via the use of domestic materials and domestic images. Perhaps we also shouldn’t forget Lucio Fontana’s *spatialism*, those cut canvases whose lacerated emptiness resounds onto the Italian ‘70s.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p.168.

merely ‘visions’³⁵⁰. Unlike Guber’s artworks – feet and legs made of beeswax, leather, human hair which cannot move although they replicate the human form – at the theatre utopian visions are inhabited visions, visions which the living human body interacts with. And this, to use Pasolini’s expression once more, ‘adds reality’ (quite a lot of reality) to what could be mere mirage.

•

Reduction, relocation. When Silvana Sinisi asserts, in introducing the New Spectacularity for an historical anthology of Italian theatre, that what takes place within it is a ‘taking revenge in the aesthetic as a strategy for dissensus’³⁵¹, she produces a sentence whose force runs deeper than many other theories would allow us to think. Let me underline that Sinisi’s assertion also takes place in a wake, much like Palandri’s as he describes Tondelli’s move (‘Of course it was a failure of sorts...’³⁵²), much like Mendini’s theorisation of the everyday banal (‘After the death of a revolutionary proletariat...’³⁵³):

³⁵⁰ ‘Often the practice articulates what in words triggers immediate skepticism and dismissal. Yet the generous act catches the spendthrift habit of the world off guard; naïve as it may have appeared, *flowers in the gun barrels* no doubt caught their bearers off guard the first time, changed the identity of the object in their hands by a performed act (...). Practice as utopia? Clearly not, but perhaps the work of practice (...) “presents... *what utopia would feel like* rather than how it would be organized”’. Skantze, P.A. ‘A Good Catch: Practicing Generosity’. *Performance Research* 12:2, pp.138-144. p. 142. Both emphases my own.

³⁵¹ Sinisi, Silvana. ‘Neoavanguardia e postavanguardia in Italia’ in *Avanguardie ed Utopie del Teatro, Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo Vol. 20*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001. p. 717

³⁵² Palandri, Enrico. *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2005. p. 19

³⁵³ Mendini, Alessandro. *Per un'Architettura Banale*, 1979.

Having lost its political battle, the glorification of the power of the imagination takes its revenge in the aesthetic as a new revolutionary instrument for the strategy of dissensus.³⁵⁴

Revolutionary: how many times has this word appeared? I can tell you: fifteen times. It isn't nothing. Revolutionary: able to perform full circles, circles in which the hope is that we do not return again to our starting positions – but of course, we take the risk. Revolutionary, that is, *transformative*. And dependent, as such, on a relocation of power – that is, on a transformation of the apparatus. If the artist, notably the visual artist, is at that point in the process of late-capitalisation of the art world where he or she is becoming cynical, playing the market, demonstrating the futility of his or her own endeavours, performing avant-garde and conformist at the same time³⁵⁵, celebrating the work of art's own impotency – are we to assume that everybody has signed up to a certain apparatus? Is that possible? Can we posit that the interference with the structures of art, posing as passive sabotage, is happening on a clandestine level? Can we posit that it is no longer in the work of art but in its shadow that movements are taking place? Can we move to the shadow, pack up our bags and like fireflies relocate once more, secretly setting up a basement on the rooftop? I feel I can see, if I squint, a body hanging upside down on the apparatus in the night, invisibly attempting to make a part of the scaffolding fall, pushing its lightness towards the glossy plains of the nonetheless.

³⁵⁴ Sinisi, Silvana. 'Neoavanguardia e postavanguardia in Italia' in *Avanguardie ed Utopie del Teatro, Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo Vol. 20*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001. p. 717. Emphasis my own.

³⁵⁵ I am referring again to the aforementioned passages quoted from Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. pp. 122-123

Part Three:

New Spectacularities, New Spectacles, New Spectators

Surface Games and Side Effects: the New Spectacular Image

In part II of this investigation I discussed the workings of various mechanisms by which what we may refer instinctively to as the ‘visual’ theatre of the New Spectacularity is one in which an idea of visibility forcefully and continuously goes back to and insists upon a question of space, of place, and of environment. The inhabitable image is a spatialised one: it relies on an idea of theatre, as Derrick De Kerckhove once wrote, as ‘always the physical manifestation of a mental space’³⁵⁶. The concept of the metropolitan makes for a powerful example of this physicalisation of the mental, a powerful proof that a certain mental space *does exist*. The concept of the metropolitan also makes apparent how if we think image and space as bound to each other (a repetitive tilting of the angle, a tilting which is first of all a mental tilting), the notion of the visual, at the theatre, recovers its excesses of sensuality, of pulviscule, and of affect, which its appearance as ‘ocularcentric’ could otherwise push out of the picture.

Here, I think it is important to also note again how the concept of the metropolitan performs this recovery of sensual and affective excess without resorting to forcing open the boundaries of make-believe: there is no need for immersion here. Indeed, the concept of the metropolitan already implicitly holds all this double-edgedness within itself, the clashing of two and three dimensions: the metropolis is an unreal image, the one we could see drawn on a comic strip or built on the set of a science fiction film. Yet, it *means* ‘city’ (in fact it means ‘mother city’), and this implies and makes space for the dwelling and movement of human beings within its perimeter. Perhaps this metropolis gives rise to an unknown fourth

³⁵⁶ De Kerckhove, Derrick. ‘Il Senso Comune del Virtuale’ in VIRTUAL 4, April 1993.

dimension, like the one which Edwin Abbott's square from Flatland, after having met the sphere, was so disappointed not to know³⁵⁷.

Yet the act of spatialising the visual, the theoretical manoeuvre of understanding the image as inhabitable, cannot answer all of our questions alone. Or, more accurately, having set up the inhabitable image by way of a deep engagement with the notion of the metropolitan, a host of other questions regarding this image enter and take hold. My study of the imagined Americas of both Antonio Syxty and Magazzini Criminali produce two very 'real' metaphors which may exemplify some of these questions: one concerns a soft breeze, and one concerns a kind of humid heat. In both cases these unrecordable entities have been carried towards us; in both cases the unarchivable attributes of an atmosphere (quite literally here: weather conditions) have reached us through other documents, in the shape of words, images, audio and video recordings. These communications, these signals which, to return to Mendini, 'pass only through the skin'³⁵⁸ have been hot enough to bend the silent seals of the archive.

The turn this study takes now is to ask the image about all the other things it is able to do, in the New Spectacular theatre, once its ontological contours have been seen to coincide with the ontological contours of the environment: what is at stake here, now? What are the implications of an image becoming inhabitable, what openings does it offer for making and

³⁵⁷ I refer to Edwin Abbott's 1884 novella *Flatland: a Romance of Many Dimensions*, because I am reminded here (and often) of Societas Raffaello Sanzio's Chiara Guidi's considerations about James Abbott's book, which she adapted for the theatre in the mid-2000s: 'he [James Abbott] has managed to imagine a world that doesn't exist but through the form of art, the form of poetry, I can now say that this world is, that it does exist'. An obvious comment, perhaps. But one, I feel, worth making again and again: of course this theatre responds to the real, takes from the real, reacts to the real; but it would be a shame to forget that the system itself is independent.

³⁵⁸ I refer again to Mendini's *Universal Cosmesis*: 'Giving in to decoration is to accept that people don't communicate profoundly, that intimately we are solitary, but that what can circulate amongst us is what passes through the skin, the surface (...)'. Mendini, Alessandro. 'Cosmesi Universale'. Supplement to *Domus* no. 617, 1981.

spectating? Where do we go from here? Eloise is blowing, still blowing her warm breeze, but she's locked in the TV set, 'for now'; Kerouac has been, I use Magazzini's word, *emulsified* and La Gaia Scienza have made the street enter the house: a series of surface games have been executed by way of different kinds of angle-tilting. It would be tempting to think that the 'intense' dimensional and ontological coincidence (between city and art, between space and image) implicit in the notion of the metropolitan execute the perfect crime, the definitive flattening of reality: yet what I hope to make present in the material that follows, is that the crime is never perfect. 'For now', in the meantime, we inhabit the side of the surface, the shadow of something invisible, perhaps the shadow of nothing. We are not – perhaps not *yet* – in the world of simulacra. We are in a just before and just after kind of moment, a more haunted place, a limit, a line.

•

Surface games, and side effects. In using the word 'surface' here I refer to a mixture of phenomena: I refer to the flatness of the film, the flatness of the screen, of the image in two dimensions that animates so much Neo-Spectacular work. I refer to the 'superficial' qualities referred to by Mendini in his 'Universal Cosmesis', in which 'superficial' stands for the acceptance of an intimate solitude made bearable by the festoons and confetti of an epidermal community, but also stands for 'ephemeral', 'transient', which is also, vitally, *intermittent*. I also refer, via the word 'cosmesis', to all of those images – the imagined America, the use of models, the flatness of TV, the languages of advertising – which circulate so pervasively in

the theatre of this time, and which speak a language which is vernacularly ‘superficial’: a language which accumulates its pleasures in frivolity, in nonchalance, in a purposeful (whether tragic or ironic) ‘lack of depth’. I refer also to inscribable surfaces, such as the surface of vinyl, which ‘keeps hot’ Magazzini Criminali’s *Crollo Nervoso*. And indeed to the film, which safeguards a number of other performances, images impressed by way of luminosity onto resins and plastics. Finally, to a series of writings from some of the makers whose theatre we are talking of here: Syxty’s will to ‘reach the absolute surface, the moment in which a story is synthesised in a photograph’³⁵⁹; Marco Solari’s talk of a search for the ‘zero’ of the stage, of representation, and of signification³⁶⁰; Magazzini Criminali’s concentrated attention to the culture of the skin, the cult of the body, the model, the body builder, the beauty cream³⁶¹; Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s will to renounce depth and weight³⁶²; Falso Movimento’s systems of images, assembled to illusively cross flatness with the body of the performer. I shall return to these specific instances of ‘surface games’ (none of which remain ‘playful’ for very long) in the sections making up this third and final part of this thesis. For now, I want to concentrate on what affording flatness a ‘depth’ may yield. Can there, indeed, be shadows in flatland? And if so, what is the nature of such shadows?

Surface games: my intention is to pay some attention to what I have understood the

³⁵⁹ Syxty quoted by Serra, Umberto. Review for *Copertine*. Naples, July 1982. Published in Bertoldo, Mino. OutOff: 1978-2008. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008. p.110.

³⁶⁰ Solari, Marco in conversation with Oliviero in Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988.

³⁶¹ These themes are elaborated on extensively by Magazzini in the first three issues of the Magazzini fanzines. For chosen pieces and descriptions, and for an analysis of the development of these trajectories in the 1979-1980 (Mendini-designed) piece Ebdòmero see also Bonfiglioli, Rossella. *Frequenze Barbare: Teatro Ambiente / Cinema / Mass Media / Metropoli / Musica / Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini Criminali Prod.* Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981.

³⁶² I refer here to material from the script and from the preparatory notes of Sanzio’s *Kaputt Necropolis* (1984), in analysis here towards the end of this thesis.

theatre-makers of the New Spectacularity might have meant by employing a vocabulary of surface, and to wire up such vocabulary with the philosophical, aesthetic landscape we have come to understand as ‘metropolitan’. Surface games: games which occur on the surface, which in the surface have their place. Side effects: positing that something may happen at the *side* of the surface. Positing, indeed, that a surface can have a side, *in the first place*. And side effects, again: I choose this particular expression not to refer to something which happens fortuitously or without calculation, but to, in a manner of speaking, the price you pay for the pill you take. I use the expression ‘side effect’ because it too exists in a sphere in which in order to resolve, or forget about, a certain kind of trouble in the foreground, an openness to a different kind of trouble is developed in the background. The term ‘side effect’ also exists in the sphere of the nonetheless, of risks taken with fingers crossed.

•

Surfaces spin on a sort of merry-go-round of critical interest: there are times when they matter and times when they are suspect. In the present, a resurgence of interest in surfaces seems to me to be taking place: a conference on surfaces was held in Manchester in the Summer of 2013, in which an emerging field of ‘surface studies’ was named into being³⁶³; Tim Ingold’s work on lines has ushered in a series of questions about surfaces³⁶⁴, and Joseph

³⁶³ The name of the conference was ‘Surfaces: contesting boundaries between materials, mind and body’ (Manchester, 5th-10th August 2013). Although the conference was organised by the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, I think it’s important to note that this was an interdisciplinary conference, involving scholars from sociology, anthropology, perception studies, architecture amongst other fields.

³⁶⁴ Tim Ingold was one of the keynote speakers at the conference referred to above, but I am referring here to the 2007 work *Lines: a Short History*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Amato published a book in 2013 entitled *Surfaces: a History*, which beautifully, and carefully, moves on from and accompanies his previous work on dust³⁶⁵. Some light is shed, now, on surfaces, towards surfaces, via other entities which can take us nowhere but *there*, to the surface: we get there via lines, dust, measurements, interiors and exteriors, texture, grain. It is fascinating, then, to watch the word (again the word: surface is not a word, but can only be spread abroad through words) return: to watch the word in its intermittence, in its reappearing and disappearing. To encounter it in its context of the 1980s and to encounter it in its contexts of the now, and to wonder what it might have meant and what it means. To be sure, it means many different things: but its principal sense for me, and its principal sense for the context I am writing in here, is ‘a place where things stop’. A place, that is, that does not lead us other places. An unproductive place perhaps; a place with no ‘behind’. A place where the only thing left to investigate is the only thing left. Indeed, the ‘zero’, that is the place between +1 and –1, a place of suspension between two worlds, one of which is impossible, invisible, immaterial, unknown and the other which *has disappointed us since we were four years old*³⁶⁶.

Two kinds of work on surface seem to emerge, to my knowledge, from recent scholarship: one kind dedicated to surface because of its texture, its grain, its groove, the sensual information it carries; the other which privileges surfaces in their seamless unknowability, a movement which often resolves itself in speaking of surfaces as loci of projection, of reflection or of refraction. As such, I wonder if it would be possible to say that

³⁶⁵ Amato, Joseph. *Surfaces: a History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013 and *Dust: a History of the Small and the Invisible*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

³⁶⁶ I quote here from Claudia Castellucci who in her *Santa Sofia / Teatro Khmer Manifesto* (November 1984) declares: ‘this is the theatre of the new religion: that’s why only you come, you who wish to be a disciple to columns of the Unreal. We know the real, and it has disappointed us since we were four years old. Is it not the same for you?’.

neither of these categories are truly doing work on surfaces, because both trends invest surfaces with properties that, arguably, are not implicit in the notion of surface itself. I also wonder whether this is the inevitable point we reach when we attempt to engage with surfaces: I wonder if it is necessary to treat them as something *else* in order to treat them as *anything* at all.

Temporarily leaving aside, but not overcoming, this ontological impasse it is interesting to note how the cultural worlds of the early 1980s make appearances especially, if not only, in the second category described above: surfaces in their relationship not with texture but with light. Owen Hatherley, Deyan Sudjic and Mark Fisher are some of the current theorists in which I have found an attention to surfaces of the 1980s, and this attention often regards the built environment, both exterior and interior: the glossy sides of skyscrapers, the mirror balls of nightclubs, the transparent perfection of coffee tables, perfect for taking cocaine. All surfaces, in fact, that ‘play games’, by masking and displaying, rendering brilliant or opaque, by multiplying, breaking or refracting the light, but which all, invariably, are unconcerned with revealing anything about themselves other than precisely their ‘surfacedness’ in itself because – unlike the surfaces of the first kind – they thrive on an unknowability, on a muteness (a muteness which often translates as reflection: the mirror shows us nothing other than our inescapable selves). These second category surfaces appear as loci of cynicism, maybe – always associated with bankers and brokers and yuppies and advertisers, with people who in the collective imagination want to fake, or conceal, or show off. They are, almost certainly, loci of unhappy consciousness, or more precisely loci where the unhappy consciousness can thrive: in second category surfaces the libidinal work of self-trickery can

manifest itself and become apparent, nay transparent.

A blind spot, then: interest in surfaces, but impossibility of doing anything with them other than describe them. Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear – hence the crash. While this dialectical car crash is the very purpose of looking at surfaces *in the first place* (which is also inevitably the last), it is also, perhaps, part of what earns surfaces their ‘bad reputation’, and part of what, again perhaps, earns some Neo-Spectacular works certain pockets of bad reputation, and a certain historical weightlessness. ‘Cosmesis’, ‘decoration’, these words again all flow into the stream of the word *superficie*. *Super* + *ficie*: face dressed up, made up, frontal face, face on top, face that faces the world and *must* reveal something of its nature. If its hands are cold, there must be a hot inside, a hot heart lurking somewhere. Surfaces are, as Amato himself states after James Gibson’s *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, ‘where the action is’³⁶⁷: where experience happens, or at the very least, where experience starts – and the theatre-makers of the New Spectacularity are, it seems to me, extremely conscious of this, and desire to make this ‘where the action is’ apparent, tangible. At the same time, there’s a political ‘but’ which has to do with what we saw in Mendini: the idea that we communicate on the surface although intimately we are solitary. After all, the

³⁶⁷ James Gibson’s 1986 *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* has influenced much of the work on surfaces and on feeling, affect and experience thereafter – and, though indirectly, Gibson’s work also provides some of the spine of my work here. Martin Welton opens his 2012 book *Feeling Theatre* with James Gibson, an opening I want to quote because on a certain level it resonates with my, parallel, investigations: ‘As the psychologist James Gibson observed, thinking about the senses has become abstracted from the environmental conditions to which they pertain. Thus it is, Gibson proposed, that we are characteristically left with discussions of an abstracted ‘visual field’ rather than of the world into which vision extends. The visual field can be seen and considered, painting-like, from without its immediate apprehension. The visual world which moves as I move is significantly, and by contrast, discovered directly and ambulando as I move within it, rather than via an introspective experience in which the exterior world is mentally represented as if a picture, or code, to be interpreted. For Gibson, any account of perception must configure the world as it is *inhabited*, not as it is conceived.’ Welton, Martin. *Feeling Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p. 1. Emphasis my own.

word ‘surface’ is paired with the word ‘zero’ in almost all of the writings of the Neo-Spectacular generation, signalling not a ‘nothing’ but an emptying out, an idea of communication made in a room with marble walls.

The postmodern vindication of surfaces, like the holographic postcard, oscillates between the euphoria and the discontent of the dialectical dead end. Similarly to the unhappy consciousness, or to compassionate pessimism, the surface poses the problem of an empty space – desired and conquered but irremediably empty – in which the tempting option is always to see and understand it as *full*, in the inability to completely celebrate what art critic Achille Bonito Oliva called the ‘sparkling impotency’ of the work of art³⁶⁸. Here we are again, in the lexical world of scintillas, of sparkles, of fireflies ushered in to intermittently illuminate a certain darkness. For Achille Bonito Oliva, whose thinking could be seen as being partly aligned with Mendini’s although it probably (enthusiastically? cynically? clumsily?) irons out some of its more painful folds, this sparkling impotency is to be celebrated because it is intensely *liberating*: once the artist realises how impotent the work of art is, the case is closed

³⁶⁸ Achille Bonito Oliva speaks of ‘sparkling impotency of the work of art’ in terms of the challenge of the Transavantgarde active in painting in Italy at the same time as the Neo-Spectacularity. By celebrating such a state the Transavantgarde ‘progresses beyond the euphoric idea of creative experience as experimental process, and beyond the evolutionistic idea of linguistic darwinism which found its ancestors in the historical avantgardes’ in order to throw into a state of crisis the ‘hysteria of the new, typical of traditional avantgardes, and the idea of progress allegedly implicit in its experimentations’. Bonito Oliva, Achille. *Il Passo dello Strabismo*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978. I have studied and written about the resonances and dissonances between the aesthetics (and never only aesthetics) of the Transavanguardia and those of the New Spectacularity; my reflections on the subject are largely absent from this study because they would deserve a study of their own – I have refrained from including them here, although I will advance some questions in the next footnote.

and work can continue³⁶⁹. Yes, in theory it can, but we're always at the same kind of party, have you noticed? We clink our glasses, but with heavy hearts.

Possibly, the problem of surface is essentially a problem of depth. Perniola again offers a particularly attuned view regarding the notion of surface, in an article from 2004 republished (significantly?) in 2013³⁷⁰. Here, Perniola singles out two obstacles to rethinking the idea of surface: the first, he argues, is the Germanic tradition of *Tiefe* in the 1800 and 1900s, which makes depth and interiority coincident; the second is postmodernism, which 'by celebrating flexibility, lightness, ephemerality and even a certain frivolity (...) seemingly equates 'depth' with an *ethical* dimension of existence, in opposition to postmodern *aestheticisation*'³⁷¹. Let us note that Perniola employs the adverb 'seemingly': later in the article, whose body consists of an illuminating process of tracing the words *profundus* and *bathos* in their parallel yet opposed histories in the Latin and in the Greek language respectively, Perniola arrives at a differentiation not between two terms – surface and depth –

³⁶⁹ Achille Bonito Oliva seems, at least in my reading of his texts, to consistently discount the presence of the 'nonetheless', the particular kind of affective positioning I have been seeking to describe throughout this work (and chosen to epitomise in Mendini's theoretical writings). This, of course, is not a problem: the problem is that everything Bonito Oliva describes seems, again in my reading of his work, to chime in tune with that affective stance. A matter of cynicism? These are some questions I would like to think of in the future. In a recent 1980s special for *Alfabeta*, Nicolas Martino wrote an article entitled 'La Luccicanza Italiana: Il Postmoderno come Apparato di Cattura', 'Italian Sparkles (Italian Fireflies?): The Postmodern as Capturing Device' in which a series of writings and events are woven into a (very thoughtful) Italian postmodernist narrative, including Bonito Oliva and Mendini – yet I am not sure we're always talking about the same thing. Although Martino concludes on the usual notes of dismissal and Right-leaning disaster without acknowledging the openings which might have been (were) woven into the fabric of Italian postmodernism, he makes some much-more-attentive-than-usual points: 'we could speak of the early 1980s in Italy as of an upside-down version of '77, even culturally. (...) Italian postmodernism is essentially a sophisticated skeptical ideology which we cannot discount as mere neoconservatism, since its more authentic nature is probably enclosed in an aphorism by Bernard Rosenthal: skepticism is an ideology of the reflex (...)'. The fact that the conversation is open again can be nothing but a good thing. Martino, Nicolas. *La Luccicanza Italiana. Alfabeta* 2.33, November-December 2013. p. 8

³⁷⁰ Perniola, Mario. 'Per una rivalutazione della nozione di profondità' ('For a re-evaluation of the notion of depth') in *Agalma*, 25, 2013: *Che Cos'è l'Intimità?* Milan: Mimesis, 2013.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

but between three: surface, depth and the sublime. A differentiation synthesised better, although still not perfectly, in the English term *profound*, which in sharing part of its semantic field with the word ‘deep’ also shares its affiliation with the Latin *profundus*, and is relieved of some of the descriptive, spatial meaning of its linguistic root. Perniola observes that by way of a series of philosophical steps, and by way of a series of steps in the history of Christian thought, the notion of depth has been stretched in two directions, both ‘upwards and downwards’ so to speak. This, crucially for the theatre, muddles the spheres of immanence and transcendence. Definitions for different *kinds* of abyss. He writes:

First of all, it isn’t true that the notion of depth contains an implicit spiritualistic prejudice: Plotinus, who was an expert of the soul, attributed depth to the material, and not to the spiritual. Also, the spiritualistic orientation of aesthetics privileges the sublime, not the deep. So when postmodernism declares war on the notion of depth, postmodernism itself is the victim of a surreptitious identification, although it isn’t an accidental one: in its hostility towards the deep, postmodernism manifests its latent spiritualism.³⁷²

Surreptitious, but not accidental. The third term derived in the space between *bathos* and *profundus*, which is also, in one of its historical incarnations, *Tiefe*, is not ‘deep’ exactly, but ‘sublime’. The postmodern refusal of the deep, in this reading, is flawed because it undoes something it immediately redoes ‘on the other side’ – it refuses depth while all the time knowing it has become coincident with the sublime. As soon as the refusal is put into motion, a side effect, perhaps we should say *the* side effect appears: in the quest for surface the sublime reappears. This can be seen as yet another ‘relocation’, but I would argue that it is an

³⁷² Ibid.

incomplete relocation. The sublime that appears in the notion of surface is *not* depth in its relocated form, but an entity with an ontological status different from that of depth and nevertheless able to do work similar to the work of depth, but ‘in negative’.

Perniola essentially disagrees with the dichotomy linking the deep to ‘spirit’ or in fact to Catholicism – Amato, on the contrary, dwells on the generally more accepted Catholic binary which sees soul against body and depth against surface, a binary often implicit in a certain reading of the idea of ‘flesh’, and indeed of its possible mortification. Hence, Perniola could also be seen to disagree with the motives of, or refuse to be fooled by, the critical move operated by many, most patently visible in Ihab Hassan’s table of differences between the modern and the post-, which sees ‘depth’ under the category of modernity and ‘surface’ in the postmodern column³⁷³. In spite of this, Perniola concludes that the most appropriate view on surfaces for the purposes of contemporary thinking is to posit depth as ‘stratification’, for it allows for ‘a deconstruction of the opposition (...) not in favour of the deep but in favour of the surface. This route allows us to not fall into the trap of interiority, and to answer to the necessities of a thinking which has its focus in the experience of exteriority’³⁷⁴. Depth as a layering of surfaces, then: an archeological approach. And where would this layering of surfaces stop? At the centre of the Earth?

³⁷³ Ihab Hassan’s table of differences appears in Hassan, Ihab. ‘Toward a Concept of Postmodernism’ in his *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987. Hassan’s table, to be sure, comes with a warning at the end regarding the inevitable future (and present) shift of categories. In *Art and its Shadow*, remembering Hassan’s table and David Harvey’s ‘augmentation’ of the table some years later, what Perniola especially questions is why is the ‘table’ was so fortunate in how it dialectically presented, and whether it was the ‘support’ of modernism underpinning such structures which obliges postmodernism to get ‘stuck’ in a game of not really dualisms, but *duplications*. Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Trans. Massimo Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004. pp. 26-27

³⁷⁴ Perniola, Mario. ‘Per una rivalutazione della nozione di profondità’ in *Agalma*, 25, 2013: *Che Cos’è l’Intimità?* Milan: Mimesis, 2013.

My sense is that Perniola, in addition to his work in 2004, had previously advanced solutions to this problem in other writings. In the conclusion of the article quoted, he invites the reader to look at previous works, notably *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*, published originally in 1990, and *Ritual Thinking: Sexuality, Death, World*, a volume containing two pivotal texts in his production which date from 1980 and 1985 respectively³⁷⁵. A significant portion of Perniola's philosophy is, in fact, based on a desire to overcome the fetish of *Tiefe* in order not quite to relocate it in the surface, but rather to understand what surface and exteriority may produce that is comparable to *Tiefe* but which differs in set-up (if it didn't, we would be merely looking for depth in the surface). The fact that Perniola asks his reader to go back to these texts at the end of the aforementioned article is interesting because these texts, in my reading of them, lead not only to this idea of 'stratification' but also to the theses made in his *Art and its Shadow* where, rather than in a layering, the question of surface resolves itself – via the notion of shadow – in affording the surface a side. This is a 'resolution' that interests me here, and which can be productive for considering the rhetoric of surface as found in the works of art produced and circulated by New Spectacularity.

This particular book of Perniola's, published in 2000, poses itself the problem of 'the greatness of art': not of *what* it is, but of *where*, if at all there is still room for such a thing. I would formulate the question like this: where does art *happen*? Or, more precisely, where *can* art happen? Perniola sifts through many examples of art and anti-art and points at the shortcomings of various strategies – shortcomings mostly related to what we have come to call cynicism and commercialism, the shortcomings of art pressed into the moulds of the

³⁷⁵ I make reference here to Perniola's volumes *La Societa' dei Simulacri* and *Transiti*. Both Bologna: Cappelli, 1980 and 1985 respectively.

world of media, marketing and commodity. The place where art can happen is that place of ‘difference’ which Perniola describes here as a ‘third route’, which in turn is identified in the ‘shadow’. This shadow is explained in various ways throughout the text: where ‘difference’ is, where the ‘difficulty’ of art becomes visible, where, as Hugh J. Silverman writes in his introduction to the English text, ‘a much more subtle and refined experience can take place’³⁷⁶. The most significant passages, however, seem to me to be the ones that ask themselves the question of where the aura is, the question that underpins this talk of *shadows*. In the chapter entitled ‘The Third Regime of Art’, Perniola observes that in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin’s ‘most important theoretical contribution’ tends to be ignored:

...the one connected to the determination of a third regime of art and of aesthetic experience, characterised by reification, by fetishism, and more generally by that phenomenon that Benjamin himself called ‘the sex appeal of the inorganic’. In the perspective of this third dimension (...) we can finally comprehend the dynamics of contemporary art, which aren’t religious in the traditional sense nor technological in the functional sense, but which participate in the pathology of religious experience (...) as well as in the technological imagination (...). It’s this third dimension that Benjamin refers to, when he underlines the confusion between actor and instrument, between human being and object, implicit in the cinematographic image (...) ³⁷⁷

Here, in this particular definition of shadow which happens in the ‘confusion’ of this ‘third dimension’, I intercept a host of junctures, which all play their part in the making of the

³⁷⁶ Silverman, Hugh J. in Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Trans. M. Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004. p xviii

³⁷⁷ Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Translation Massimo Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004. p.66

‘metropolitan’ landscape of the New Spectacularity. When Benjamin uses the sentence ‘the sex appeal of the inorganic’, he does so in describing the world exhibitions, in the essay *Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, and comparing them to the drawings of illustrator and caricaturist J. J. Grandville. Grandville’s fantasies become reality here, he argues, and they become so in the logic of the commodity:

Grandville extended the authority of fashion over the objects of everyday use, as well as to the cosmos. In pursuing it to its extremes, he revealed its nature. Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex-appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The cult of the commodity presses such fetishism into its service.³⁷⁸

‘Confusions’, here, are already beginning to arise: Grandville depicts the ring of Saturn as a balcony ‘upon which its inhabitants can go and take in the evening breeze’. In the series *Les Fleurs Animées*, flowers become women become objects of fashion, models, objects of commodity, in an operation similar to Huysmans’ character Des Esseintes who ‘goes backwards’ from art into nature, growing poisonous flowers, or encrusting tortoise shells with precious gems. Benjamin describes Grandville as ‘ending in madness’³⁷⁹. I have written previously, in part II of this thesis and on the subject of Syxty’s work, that ‘it’ll end in tears, in fact it’ll end in advertising’. At the end of Huysmans’ novel, Des Esseintes is so ill he must return to Paris, a return which he sees as that of an atheist being forced to convert: a situation

³⁷⁸ Benjamin, Walter. ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (Exposé of 1935). In *The Arcades Project*. Trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. p. 8.

³⁷⁹ The exact quote is: ‘He presented the latter in the same spirit in which advertisements –this word too (*réclames*) came into existence at that time – were beginning to present their wares. He ends in madness.’ Ibid. p. 7

which sounds remarkably like Mendini's unhappiness – which, the reader will recall, was itself described as a third route, but it was also and crucially described as 'the hardest' (as third routes tend to be).

In Perniolian terms, if the aura is gone, something else has replaced it: something which, for Perniola, is already theorised in Benjamin as precisely the sex-appeal of the inorganic, and proposed various times by Perniola in various guises, one of which is the shadow. The shadow, unlike the aura, happens on a line, happens in a shape; it isn't given off by the object, rather it relies on the object being illuminated from outside in order to exist. We cannot have a shadow without a light – so the production of aura (or, in this case, of its surrogate or its evolution: the shadow) is no longer an independent activity operated by the object, nor is it an immanent quality of the object, but relies on light in order to 'project' a shadow. We could argue, then, that it relies on *being seen* – that perhaps it relies on the participatory gaze of the spectator in order to be produced³⁸⁰.

By this, I do not mean that the spectator produces the shadow: merely that the spectator produces the light which illuminates the work of art, from which the work of art itself throws its shadow. What strikes me as important in this is that the gaze becomes necessary precisely in the place where 'confusion' arises, because the gaze itself produces that confusion: if the work of art participates in technological thinking and in religious thinking at the same time, it is work that invites the gaze to dwell, to inhabit the shadow. It is work that obliges the gaze to move into a space of negotiation where the two universes of the new work of art – its

³⁸⁰ Böhme's 'imagining subject' which I referred to as being known as the spectator on this side of town returns. Böhme, Gernot. 'The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres.' in *Ambiances, Redécouvertes*, 10 février 2013, accessed May 20th 2013 at ambiances.revues.org/315

technological, functional aspect and its participation in religious experience – can be not synthesised, but seen *at the same time*. The ‘more refined’ experience of art, in Silverman’s terms, is one which is able to make the leap between, to return to Baudrillard’s vocabulary, the ‘dead idol’ in front of us and the scintillas it may invite us to dream. Not the work of art but the opaque residue it discards within those who do the viewing; indeed, something we could call the ‘dark matter’ of spectating, a name for all the matter unaccountable for which nonetheless makes up so much of the spectating universe. Extra matter swept to the side of the surface, the impossible residue of impossible encounters with the impossible surface.

•

The ground illuminated above is the ground where the next movements of this thesis happen: the ground we are standing on. In the pages that follow I will illustrate various kinds of zeros, various kind of surfaces, and shine my torch on some of their side effects: what follows is a series of studies of certain manifestations of the quest for surface as executed on the Neo-Spectacular stage, the same manifestations I invoked in defining surface, in its multitudinous declinations, at the beginning of this chapter. Built into these studies is a progressive motion towards the ‘zero’: we will begin with the surface that traps Eloise, ‘that little sparkling video-box which muddles all the cards’³⁸¹, and we shall move closer to a face to face with the surface as we progress, keeping in mind Giuseppe Bartolucci’s almost prophetic ‘auto-interview’ of 1978, which, with crystalline clairvoyance, set out the games of

³⁸¹ From ‘Eloise il progetto’, final section of *Eloise, Vento Leggero Eloise*, script version #1. Unpublished archival material.

the – then current – theatre:

Q. Where is the Italian Avantgarde going?

A. It's going toward the end; riding into the sunset, as it were.³⁸²

³⁸² Bartolucci, Giuseppe. 'The Post Avant-Garde: "An Autointerview"' TDR, Vol. 22, No. 1, Italian Theatre Issue (Mar., 1978), pp. 103-107

Cathode Mamma Kiss Me: Television and the New Spectacularity³⁸³

A study of ‘theatre, image, and the Italian New Spectacularity 1978 - 1984’ cannot avoid confronting yet another glittering and reoccurring figure, another glittering surface, that of the television set. In truth, a study of anything at all occurring in Italy and bookended by the dates 1978 and 1984 can’t avoid such a confrontation. In conversations about my work over the past four years, in explaining to people what I do – be it in a conference setting or in a bar, be it, indeed, in talking to artists or scholars or to occasional acquaintances, to friends of friends, to family – two historical occurrences invariably make an appearance in my interlocutor’s response: the years of lead, on the one hand, and the rise of private television on the other.

As such, whoever I may be speaking to naturally, implicitly, automatically gives my work the tone specific of a transformation; a transformation which always reflects that well-trodden binary, the one between ‘lead’ and ‘mud’, between *impegno* and *disimpegno*; and which is a transformation which is almost always seen as a failure: for the Left, my work is where we missed our final opportunity; for the Right my work inhabits a moment of potential freedom and prosperity which also failed, because we failed to put that freedom and prosperity to good use. These comments are usually accompanied by a very distinct facial expression: the eyebrows are raised up high, with a trace (but only a trace) of a frown, meeting in a tiny triangle at the top of the forehead, denoting not anger nor preoccupation, but

³⁸³ I take this title from yet another Italian lyric of the time: *I like television sets / They never go to sleep / but glitter through the night. / I like television sets / With pre-printed kisses / to leave my lips ice-cold. / Cathode mamma kiss me / in my cable paradise. / Cathode mamma kiss me / my seven-channel wife.* Krisma, ‘Cathode Mamma’ on *Cathode Mamma*. Milan: Polydor Italia, 1980.

a mixture of interest, realisation and disappointment. The mouth closes in a sealed horizontal smile, the one that usually goes with a shrug of the shoulders. A mouth that says, with a certain melancholy, that there's no point crying over spilt milk.

The expression reminds me of a sentence used by Irene Liverani, who in her current work focuses on the status of those born, like herself and like me, in Italy in the mid 1980s. In her essay 'Italians 2001' she quotes her father, who had been active in leftwing politics in Bologna in the 1970s, saying that 'the moment [they] decided to have children was they moment [they] had lost hope'³⁸⁴. In the same essay, and in the video and sound work accompanying it, she delves into the extent to which television has shaped our generation. One section of the video, embedded amongst footage of the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, shows what must be 30-odd uninterrupted minutes of advertising from the time. This 'takes away reality', to use Pasolini's expression, from the events in the G8 footage, and it's disrespectful, tiresome, sad. Yet I also found watching all this familiar advertising comforting, and its taking away of reality was sincerely relieving to me: as long as I was watching lipsticks, yogurts and cars, I was safe. I suppose Liverani also wanted this: she revealed me as an 'Italian 2001', prone to the kisses of cathode mamma.

As I mentioned in part I of this investigation, there are two narratives: the narrative of an end (the end of 'lead') and the narrative of a beginning (the beginning of 'mud'). The reason this 'mud', which when christened as 'mud' by historian Indro Montanelli denoted less a social state and more a political state inside the party system (the corruption uncovered, eventually and only in part, in the 'Clean Hands' operation of the early 1990s), actually

³⁸⁴ Liverani, Irene. *Italians 2001*, mixed media. London: Chelsea Theatre, January 2014.

coincides so forcefully with the rise of television in most Italians' memory and imagination probably has something to do, once again, with Silvio Berlusconi. As such, once again (again), this is a story which is normally told in a certain way, again with those clear lines, again with the sense that we all agree, again with the brushstrokes of a post-apocalyptic storytelling.

While I do not and cannot disagree, for the facts of the past 30 years *do* speak for themselves, what I want to do is complicate the account, because again I am suspicious of how the facts speak for themselves by producing the very theory of themselves at the same time: I am suspicious of these, aforementioned, in-built mechanisms³⁸⁵. A desire to complicate harboured in investigating how the theatre-maker of the 1970s-1980s Italian 'shift' more or less knowingly responds to what now in Italy is perceived as a ruinous script, how it is acted out, acted within and maybe even acted against. When it isn't neo-television³⁸⁶ *exactly* (as is the case in Falso Movimento's pieces mentioned in part II, or in some of Syxty's pieces we

³⁸⁵ I refer back to a comment made in a footnote earlier, which I repeat part of again here: in this whirlwind of the past twenty years (which nonetheless begins, formally, in the 1980s), as well as all the alleged (and probably true, but for this reason) cultural degradation, Italy (and its system) has produced the theory of that degradation at the same time. This theory, just like the images which it is theory of, is irresistible, on two accounts: (i) within it, everything fits like the pieces of a puzzle, 2 + 2 equals 4, the lines are extremely clear; (ii) it is apocalyptic, and hence extremely, fatally attractive: as narratives go, this one *certainly* offers a 'soaking'. Furthermore, this theory makes it obligatory to side either with one faction or another, because this marked bi-polarism is also a question of image, producing the effect that the Left actively plays a game in which it can never see the cards (because it refuses to).

³⁸⁶ Umberto Eco's distinction between paleo-television and neo-television, with which he refers mostly to a switch from before to after regulation and, consequently, from a 'pedagogical' ideology to a 'spectacular' one, is a distinction which is clearly being 'felt' very acutely as it happened at this time (and has enormous effects on my generation). Although Eco's distinction is often cited as building upon Raymond Williams' reflections in his 1974 *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*, (Williams sitting in his hotel room in California, shocked by the 'flow' of American television...), there are some major differences given by Eco's solid rootedness in the Italian televisual panorama. Although it has been used as shorthand for many years now, I think Eco's essay should be reread very carefully again – my sense is that his distinction deserves to be reconsidered as an *affective* more than a semiotic distinction, as should some of the other essays it is published alongside. The essay is called 'TV: La Trasparenza Perduta' ('TV: The Lost Transparency') and it is published in Eco, Umberto. *Sette Anni di Desiderio: Cronache 1977-1983*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985. pp. 163-181

will see shortly), the spectre of neo-television (the languages, gestures, images, desires it ushers in) and the *methods* of neo-television (how it is watched, how it functions, how it seduces, how it sells) are pervasively present in Neo-Spectacular work, and if we are to engage with the easily dismissible, it's interesting to wonder why this may be. There is a sort of mimesis going on, as Oliviero Ponte di Pino observed in the late 1980s and repeated at our meeting in Milan – but we need to understand the depth and the sophistication of this strategy of mimesis: it is not the replication of the systems of media as implicit (sometimes very implicit!) commentary, but a soft assimilation into those systems as a journey into their potentialities and limits³⁸⁷. Something sophisticated can be intercepted in how the work is thinking and manipulating structures at this time, specifically in what regards its engagement with the structures of the new TV – something less ironic, more serious.

The attention I have paid over the course of this research to subcultural, marginal and experimental artistic production in those years has pushed me to ask some other questions: if the event of private television is charged with having radically altered the perception Italian society has of itself, how exactly did it do so? Can we afford to create a shorthand for the event of private television, given its alleged consequences on Italian history? Can we search for places where Italians may have collaborated in an exchange with the media, or do we have to assign Italians a passive role vis-à-vis the event of private TV? How do certain images take

³⁸⁷ Ponte di Pino writes this logic of 'mimesis' into the strategies for staging a 'grammar of the present': 'it is the need to confront significant experiences in the everyday which often identify with and underline the dynamics of the present, and which allow the theatre to enter into contact with an audience whose experiences are similar: these are themes which take hold in the postavantgarde to start and then in the New Spectacularity in their "metropolitan" incarnations. This mimetic process will lead to an appropriation of the "language of the present"'. Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. Introduction to *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988.

hold in the collective imagination, and why, and who exactly ushered them in? What images did all of this ‘rise’ bring, apart from naked women and pasta adverts? How did it change the way we regard the image, if at all? What did it not ‘add to reality’, but again what did it ‘add reality to’ – and what did it take away?

•

While the rise of private television is overwhelmingly cited as the event that started a certain degradation in Italian socio-political and cultural habits and mores, what is often, surprisingly, left out of the picture is the rise of colour TV. While most European countries introduced colour television at the end of the 1960s, Italy lagged behind until its official introduction in February 1977, which, *de facto*, was earlier and later: earlier because some areas of Italy, those bordering with France (which introduced colour in 1967), Switzerland (1968), Austria (1969) and Yugoslavia (1971) had been receiving the signal from these countries since they had introduced their own; later because, as Peppino Ortoleva has noted, many Italian families didn’t buy a TV set that could support colour until 1978 or 1979, when, again according to Ortoleva, we can truly historically say that most Italians watched TV in colour³⁸⁸. The project had begun earlier: transmission had been planned for 1972, and subsequently blocked by the PCI and the PRI³⁸⁹, for a mixture of reasons ranging from

³⁸⁸ I refer here to Peppino Ortoleva’s *Un Ventennio a Colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia, 1975-95*. Milan: Giunti, 1995 and to a short essay by the same author entitled ‘Meglio Tardi che Mai’ (‘Better Late than Never’) appeared in *Diario del Mese, Speciale 1977-2007: Se io Avessi Previsto Tutto Questo*. Anno VII, N. 2, 20/04/2007 pp. 126-132

³⁸⁹ PRI stands for Partito Repubblicano Italiano, a secular Left-wing non-Marxist party which pursued a line more and more moderate after WWII until it became, effectively, centre-Left. In the late 1970s, its leader Ugo La Malfa was making the PRI play a pivotal and very strategic role in the ‘compromise’ between the Communists (PCI) and the Demochristians (DC).

funding cuts to the pursuit of moral integrity, which the Communist Party especially perceived as threatened by colour TV³⁹⁰. The five years that passed between 1972 and 1977 were occupied by yet another debate, the political and economical choice of standard between SECAM, the French standard, and PAL, the German one, a debate that, while the Italian appliances firm Indesit laboured over an Italian standard which it eventually presented too late (in 1983), amounted to the choice between selling Thomson or Telefunken TV sets. SECAM was originally chosen and then switched to PAL in 1983, when in any case most televisions could more or less work with both. There is very little difference between the two systems – if anything, SECAM looks a little more antiquated because of its tendency to cross colours: when the colour shown is monochrome, tiny lines of green and blue appear, almost scratching the surface. The years we are dealing with here, then, are years in SECAM. We shall return to this, to the quality of colour.

Another event which should be considered (and which more often than not isn't) as background to the rise of private television is the earlier rise of private radios, which – I again stress the importance of nomenclature in the historical – are referred to now, and then, as *radio libere*, 'free radios'. These arose in the mid-1970s after a liberalisation act passed in 1974 which curtailed RAI's state monopoly on the airwaves, and which effectively opened up the FM frequencies to private broadcasting. It was followed by another act, in 1976, which

³⁹⁰ Here Ortoleva makes the important point that by stalling the project, the Left 'definitively tied its identity to the idea of "austerity", also in the sense of hostile to television and to fun. This is the image that all of those who sustained commercial television would have later invoked', a reputation that the Left still hasn't entirely shaken off: the Left is in 'black and white' and the Right is 'in colour'. The Left that Berlusconi still calls 'the Communists', the ones that, to return to Adriano Sofri's article, 'spoil everyone's fun', versus his various parties drenched in the lexicon of football, of freedom, and of love. Peppino Ortoleva's *Un Ventennio a Colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia, 1975-95*. Milan: Giunti, 1995.

extended the liberalisation of the airwaves to the sphere of television but, crucially for what happened later, both acts refer exclusively to local broadcasting³⁹¹. Between 1974 and 1984 a series of laws, acts and amendments gave rise to the phenomenon historians call the ‘televisual wild west’ of the early Italian ‘80s, an expression that refers to the ‘cowboys and indians’ style free-for-all made possible by a legislation which was inexpert at the best of times and deeply corrupt at the worst.

Although it’s an interesting story, I won’t continue, here, with the filigree of laws, decrees, scandals and subterfuges that marked the passage from one media landscape to the next. However I do want to engage with the image of the free radios versus the image of the private television networks, both in the historical then and in the historicised now: the free radios – the most famous of which still broadcast now, with the exception of the thoroughly mythologised Radio Alice, the station aligned with the *autonomia* movement in Bologna and closed down by the police in 1977 – are generally assumed to have opened up vital space for experimentation and democratisation in public broadcasting (I say generally because although they were and are hailed as such by, amongst others, the *autonomisti*, the Communist Party was absolutely against the use of the word ‘free’ for something which was effectively

³⁹¹ The ‘local’ character of private TV, initially legislated for, is crucial because it is the one aspect of the law that made Berlusconi’s monopoly impossible and, at the same time, the one aspect of the law Berlusconi’s empire is based on. Berlusconi’s media company Fininvest, had been violating the local-only rule for years via what became known as *cassettizzazione* (‘cassettisation’): at dawn hundreds of tapes would leave the Fininvest headquarters and travel via any means (taxis, cars, ships, train, planes), accompanied by Fininvest workers, to reach the various regional sub-networks Fininvest had bought up but not absorbed (the so-called ‘syndication’ system, US-style). Bettino Craxi, prime minister from 1983 to 1987, organised and pushed for a series of laws known now as ‘decreti Berlusconi’ decriminalising Fininvest’s operations, culminating in the 1990 law known as ‘Legge Mammi’, which officially allows for parallel monopolies, effectively, to take place in the private sector (the law was ironically referred to as ‘polaroid’, since all it did was photograph the – criminal – situation the way it was and make it lawful). Craxi was sentenced to 27 years for various corrupt operations in the early 1990s; he fled to Tunisia, where he was protected by Ben Ali’s government, and eventually died in his villa in Hammamet.

‘private’³⁹²). The private television channels, on the contrary, are seen as mere vehicles for advertising, and overwhelmingly held responsible for having spoken to ‘the belly of Italians’³⁹³ and hence for having started the torrent of images we now associate with the ‘phenomenon’ of *Berlusconismo*. Is this stark opposition a fair one? After all, although Telemilano was effectively the first private network, built for the residents of the recently built Milano 2 (the idea of television has its genesis, for Berlusconi, in his career in real estate), these channels – like their sisters, the radios – have noble roots in pirate broadcasting and in post-radio experimentation, with the earliest private UHF channel, Tele Capodistria-Koper, being set up by a group of young Italo-Slovenian experimentalists as early as 1968 (and doing colour, in PAL, before either Italy or Yugoslavia)³⁹⁴.

I state this not only to stress, once again, how the sword of a certain ‘freedom’ is always double-edged, but also to resuscitate a way of thinking of these TVs as not solely exercises in financial gain. Tele Capodistria-Koper, to stay with this example, set up as the Italian channel for Slovenia and the Slovenian channel for Italy, programmed independent films and acclaimed documentaries which sought to demystify the Communist realities of Eastern Europe, produced its own relatively experimental cartoons and sketch-shows, broadcast concerts (both classical and ‘modern’) and international theatre and dance and, as one of the

³⁹² In reading articles dated 1976-1977 from the L’Unità historical archive (Antonio Gramsci’s newspaper, to be clear) I have found recurring reminders to not call the ‘free radios’ free; these reminders seem to quietly disappear later in the decade, perhaps as the distinction fades from importance. This fact (and many others) is also acknowledged in Monteleone, Franco. *Storia della Radio e della Televisione in Italia: Costume, Società e Politica*. Venice: Marsilio, 1992. pp. 377-400

³⁹³ This is a journalistic cliché; I’ll keep using it, even in English, because it does a good job at describing the effect.

³⁹⁴ Massimo Emanuelli’s *50 di Storia della Televisione Attraverso la Stampa Settimanale* (Milan: Greco e Greco, 2004) gives a series of fascinating accounts about Telecapodistria-Koper. A longer essay by the author solely concentrating on Telecapodistria (in which he also publishes many of its show schedules) is accessible here storiaradiotv.it/telecapodistria

very first 24-hour channels, even managed to programme some late night soft porn when RAI treated its viewers to eight hours of testcard³⁹⁵.

While (like the basements) the idea of a private radio is arguably easier to romanticise there is no reason for there not to have been enthusiasm for the idea of private television, which could have played a similar role to that of radios in the media landscape – and which, I have reason to believe, did, and this is an area that deserves more attention. One of Antonio Syxty's performances we will see in the pages that follow, for instance, took place in a private television studio: from where we stand now, it's easy to be certain that Syxty, following the typical logic of his 'games', was winking at the world of 'belly' entertainment and performing a playful or ironic mimesis. What is harder, and makes you less popular, is to imagine that the operation of staging *Ragazze 81* in a TV studio had at its heart something like a love for the medium, and plans for it as an alternative medium. Yet I see no reason not to consider this as a real possibility – in fact, I find it more probable. After all, that is, literally speaking, what private television ('free' television?) was: an alternative channel. There is no reason, theoretically, for private local TV to not have been seen as attentive, democratic and close to the people: it was local, and private, and indeed began on the scale of the neighbourhood, so why would it not, at least for a moment, have been invested with similar qualities to those of radio?

I am leaving the door open to speculation here, to the records we may not have, true to the conviction that *everything that didn't happen* is also a part of history, and that everything

³⁹⁵ See Emanuelli's work cited above. Ortoleva has also written about the space of the night being normalised or somehow validated by private television in these years – this too deserves more attention.

that *almost* happened is also a part of history, and to the intuition (when I began to work on this subject: more than an intuition now) that other visions were indeed dreamt up, or at least prepared, for the newly gained ‘free’ access to the video-world³⁹⁶. Generally though, from the records we have and from what we know, from the scholarship accumulated on the subject, and crucially from how this moment is remembered, I have to surrender to the fact that *at large* this didn’t happen: television did not respond to the same societal needs as radio. More accurately, it didn’t enter the same dimension as radio, it didn’t exist in the same sphere, didn’t fill similar shoes – perhaps it couldn’t³⁹⁷.

Despite Berlusconi’s insistence on using the word ‘amica’, female friend, for the marketing of his televisions and especially of his Rete 4 network, what this translated to was *Dallas*, or *Dynasty*, or *Santa Barbara*: it was *that* sort of friend, not the woman next door, not the warm voice on the radio. But – there *is* a but. Rete 4 was designed to waltz into the life of the housewife with jewellery and perfume, especially in the mornings, when she may have been doing the cleaning or the ironing. She may have been belly entertainment, this glamorous *amica*, yet she took hold in very little time. Rete 4 was only launched in 1982;

³⁹⁶ An immensely fascinating and long-sighted essay by Stanley Cavell published in 1982 speaks of the immaturity of television, its potential futures, its possible openings for the invention of genres and for art; embedded in the essay are also a series of anti-apocalyptic arguments which have also contributed to informing some of my own anti-apocalyptic views I shall go on to illustrate shortly. Cavell, Stanley. *The Fact of Television*. In *Daedalus* Vol. III, no. 4 (Fall 1982). Reprinted in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, Ed. John Hanhardt. Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986. pp. 192-219

³⁹⁷ There is obviously a larger question to address here which has to do with the medium of radio versus the medium of television, and by extension, with the transmission of sound versus the transmission of image. Radio is, of course, able to do things that television isn’t; but again it would be interesting to keep in mind those Italian binaries in thinking the affective relationship with both media evolving and transforming at this time. Are we in a situation, in memory, in which ‘sound is Left-wing’ and ‘image is Right-wing’? And at the time, how were the differences between the two media perceived? Although much more attention has been placed on the ‘free radios’ of the 1970s, these were, after all, few and far between compared to the commercial networks which also established themselves at the time, full of adverts and commercial music and very starkly *not* feminist phone-ins. What to do? What are we missing from the history of TV? This area would require more work.

when in 1984 it was closed down together with the other two Fininvest channels, for only three days in only three Italian regions, sizeable crowds gathered in Rome and Turin to protest³⁹⁸. So can we really say that Rete 4 didn't access the sphere of the intimate? By 1985, Rete 4 had settled on the slogan 'ogni giorno di più', 'more everyday'. The song from the channel's (frankly thrilling) Autumn 1986 season preview goes: 'come and live with us, you'll feel so many new emotions, this world is yours, you know – we give you more everyday'.

•

To summarise, then, the generally accepted historical landmark that is the advent of private TV is intimately linked to two other events: the event of colour and the event of free radios. The latter supplies the stark opposition, and politicised the rise of private TV even more than it would have been anyway: by setting an historical precedent shrouded in a certain purity, by having been deeply affiliated with the events of '77, and by presenting itself as

³⁹⁸ This is another murky filigree of events which I cannot chronicle here in their full extent: a Rome tribunal closed down the three Fininvest channels on October 16th 1984 because of the illegal strategies used by Berlusconi and company to evade the constrictions of local broadcasting which I briefly described some pages back. The court order came very late (Fininvest began transmitting 'nationally' as early as 1980) and there is speculation on why this was the case – nevertheless, the fact that the channels were closed down was a very significant event: for its consequences on the televisual panorama, for its legislative consequences, but especially for its popular value. If we consider that people watched these channels everyday and had (allegedly) become 'addicted' to their content, we can see how the blackout wasn't only a political event but also an affective event in the life of millions of people. There were protests, filmed by Fininvest; but especially Fininvest led a very knowingly orchestrated campaign which must have had some lasting effect on the collective psyche: the event of the blackout was covered by Fininvest or Fininvest-aligned press as 'frightening'. The rhetoric of 'freedom-murdering communists' appears around this event in one of its most violent incarnations, evoking not merely the usual Soviet greyness (no fun, no love etc.) but an idea of suppressed freedom of speech and of expression which played on current fears of communism in much heavier ways. At the protests we see people saying things like 'we have the right to be free' – had they been paid? Who knows. I hope so, but who knows. A lot of video-footage is available by searching 'oscuramento 1984' (blackout 1984), and makes for some interesting viewing. Give us back the Smurfs!

attentive, democratic, and close to the people (the principal ‘new’ trait of the free radio, be it left or right-leaning, insurrectionist or commercial, was the phone-in). The former, the event of colour, is almost exactly coincident with the event of private television. This means that when people speak, in memory, of how antiquated and ‘brown’ RAI looked, of how private channels showed images never seen before, of how a new lifestyle was ushered in by private broadcast, they are not only, certainly, talking about colour but they are *also* talking about colour. A technological shift happens in the televisual sphere at the same time as a legislative shift, and it is a shift which doesn’t have a parallel in the technology of radio, which remained and remains largely unchanged. A shift which revolutionises the everyday in ways incomparable to the act of phoning up a radio station, and here SECAM and PAL return to the table: because although the world had always been in colour and the cinema had been in colour for a very long time, the colour of television, especially by the time it reached Italy, is nothing like the world or the cinema at all. The world of colour TV is not ‘the world in colour’: it is *another* world. A similar world, in similar, but *other* colours: we return to the side of the surface.

Again Ortoleva, in a book that carefully deals with the advent of colour, reminds us of how this technological shift shouldn’t be underestimated in its consequences – and of how the coincidence of black and white with austerity and of colour with abundance isn’t the result of an arbitrary sign-system, nor something that should be overlooked because of its coincidence, in Italy, with the private framework:

Before making peremptory judgements, it might be good to ask some questions, remembering that the role of colour in contemporary media still

hasn't been completely theorised. TV colour, like cinema colour, isn't the result of a simple addition, but of a powerful extension of the code. But unlike cinema, a perceptual revolution is at work in television, if we understand that electronic colour is intrinsically different from, in fact it is 'the opposite' of, 'natural' colour (which is also the colour of cinema): televisual colour is given by addition of light rather than by subtraction. As such, as others have observed, television colours reality by using colours that don't exist in nature. Consequently, the advent of colour TV isn't a strengthening of the medium but a deep transformation (...). A transformation which is in itself ambivalent, because it oscillates between an excess of realism and an element of 'surreality'.³⁹⁹

This 'surreality' described by Ortoleva interests me, strikes me as generative, and as a better hypothesis for what might have been going on here. The attention to the technology of colour also strikes me as important: given the revolutionary effect, on thinking and effectively on being, brought about by technological switches and augmentations in the earlier 20th century and in the present, the relative neglect of the effect of colour TV on perception is mystifying. While I lack the technical knowledge to be in full control of this area, what I do understand is that the colour of colour TV is 'made' in the cathode (the green, the red and the blue that make up the coloured images of TV are not 'real' green, 'real' red or 'real' blue but impossible colours in nature) and that every image on colour TV is, in effect, three images: one green, one red, one blue. I also understand that in additive colour, mixing the three colours gives white, not black, since the addition is an addition of light, not of 'pigment', so to speak – so I understand that the presence of light in the equation makes for some of this intrinsic 'fakeness' which is at work in the cathode tube, or indeed this intrinsic 'surreality'. I

³⁹⁹ Ortoleva, Peppino. *Un Ventennio a Colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia, 1975-95*. Milan: Giunti, 1995. p. 15

understand, finally, what Ortoleva describes in speaking of ‘excess of realism and element of surreality’, and of the ambivalence of this combination: because what seems important to me here is not that the televisual image is somehow ‘unreal’ (for this is well-trodden ground and, as I will go on to argue, ground that allows for a certain exaggeration), but that it’s *too* real. That it shows, for the first time, the world as ‘more than itself’ – the world augmented, perhaps. It works in a groove that strikes me as the most interesting fissure in the idea of ‘the fake’ (which I will concentrate more on in the chapter that follows), that is the place in which the fake forcefully reveals both its faces at the same time: its absolute, undoubtable ‘fakeness’ to the eye and to the mind, and at the same time its complete ability to do the work, so to speak, of the real – that is, its ability to attend to the same needs or desires the real is able to attend to. This ‘trick’ is possibly the only explanation for the collective love affair of a people, of a country, with television: and it is similar to certain theatrical love affairs. Yet we tend to afford the theatrical spectator a certain agency: and if not Rancièrian emancipation exactly, then at least the nobility of an aesthetic ‘giving in’; on the contrary, the *viewer* – at least in common public discourse about the media – is easy to see as a sort of unthinking, unflinching victim of a seductive mass swindle.

In my research into this era of television over the course of this investigation, I have found it increasingly difficult to buy the apocalyptic arguments which tend to make up the bulk of Italian (and not only) theories of TV. Many Italian writers refuse to suspend their hindsight, a refusal which leads them to perform too exact a coincidence between the past

twenty years in politics and the events of television thirty years ago⁴⁰⁰. Many other media theories appear to me to have made up their mind on television *before* the medium had ripened (I think here of McLuhan's qualifications of hot and cold media, made as early as 1964 when the medium was in its infancy; of course we should consider, study and use these theories now, but we should at least be open to updating them – if not, are they not 'apriorisms'?).

Although we may want to tell a certain story a certain way, this television (by which I mean private television, in Italy, in the late 1970s and early 1980s) doesn't quite square up with many of its theories: I cannot wholly buy the assertion that television *cools* the event, thus creating a distance between the social heat of the event and the passive viewer, as is delineated in McLuhan and in Baudrillard⁴⁰¹; in fact, I find it hard to understand the passive viewer at all, because this (again, this) television strikes me as perhaps not socially, but certainly emotionally charged, overcharged in fact, exaggerated. Similarly, I am unconvinced by a lot of the public conversation on attention span, because I feel it is irresponsible to assess the effects of a medium before they have fully manifested themselves, and a little watery, perhaps, to do so by elevating to the status of evidence cues nonchalantly dispensed to us by our children. I am skeptical of the idea that 'children go grey at three because they have

⁴⁰⁰ Aldo Grasso writes: 'an enlightened trust in symbolic exchange has generated, in Italy, a whole canon of zealous and boring conspiracy-oriented literature interested only in denouncing 'the bad guys'; but if the bad guys in power were really the only reason for ruin, the world and television would be much more comprehensible, much less evil and also much less interesting'. Grasso, Aldo. *Radio e Televisione: Teorie, Analisi, Storie, Esercizi*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000. p. 54

⁴⁰¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *On Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. p. 95, and *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. p. 8. In terms of McLuhan's work, I refer of course to his theories of hot and cool media delineated in *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge, 2001 (1964).

already accumulated so much information'⁴⁰², or of the conviction, widespread in Italian public debate, that my generation votes for Berlusconi because my generation was the first to be brought up with 'his' images: we quickly realise in looking at children's hair or in observing electoral statistics, that these things are, quite simply, not true. Equally, I find it hard to accept a mere criminalisation of the televisual image, to wholly understand Karl Popper's acclaimed essay on television (repackaged in Italy, and reprinted many times, as *Cattiva Maestra Televisione*, 'Bad Teacher Television'), in which Popper associates violence on TV with an acceptance of violence in the 'real world', and calls for rules, for showing 'a little less'⁴⁰³. I wonder what 'a little less' may, in effect, mean; and I wonder to what extent criminal scenes on television do indeed perpetuate criminal behaviour. Other, more contemporary claims of this sort have been made by the sociologist Giovanni Sartori in his *Homo Videns*, whose principal thesis is that the televisual image 'fills us with nothing: so we communicate, but we communicate nothing'⁴⁰⁴. Or rather, I find Sartori's assertion very useful, although it is a shade of useful which, I feel, Sartori wouldn't commend: I find it presents a similar ontological conundrum as that posed by surfaces. I read it as an invitation to think this 'nothing', to wonder what it may be. And to wonder what the 'something' that

⁴⁰² Marshall McLuhan makes these reflections regarding children becoming senile by the age of three and goes on to discuss how there are only one-liners and no longer jokes and a series of other, similar points (the interview focuses on children) in a 1977 interview for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation National Radio, accessible via the ABC archives.

⁴⁰³ Karl R. Popper makes this and a series of other points in an essay dictated in the summer of 1994 to the director of the Italian journal 'Reset' who translated it into Italian, and which is published as 'Una Patente per Fare TV' ('A licence to make TV'). The essay focuses on a sort of survival of the fittest logic by which TV will always tend towards the worst offer possible; while it is full of interesting insight, it is also strangely moralistic (it's followed, in its Italian edition – which I understand is its only edition – by an essay by Karol Wojtyła which is actually less moralistic in tone than Popper's). Popper, Karl R. in *Cattiva Maestra Televisione*. Ed. Giancarlo Bosetti. Venice: Marsilio, 2002 (1994). pp. 69-81

⁴⁰⁴ Sartori, Giovanni. *Homo Videns*. Roma: Laterza, 2010 (1997). p. 112

preceded it may be, as well.

The enlightened trust in exchange and the overestimation of the real [present in much television theory] don't take into consideration that television quickly institutionalised itself as parallel universe, as *specular scam* of the world (...). This is why there's all this movement on the surface and a lack of becoming in the deep: this is why television is the Great Realm of reverberated events, the (sometimes enchanting) reflection of doubleness and intrigue, of the confusion of the senses and the illusions of the spirit; this is why television speaks more and more about itself and less and less about that annoying external symptom it can easily do without.⁴⁰⁵

Perhaps Aldo Grasso's paragraph above gets us closer to understanding what this nothing may be: not a nothing, but something which no longer needs its links with the 'real world' and that hence, from where we are standing, can be seen as a kind of nothing, in this logic of 'parallel universes' (which we can ignore or be fascinated by, just as we can ignore or be fascinated by parallel universes as we look to the sky: the choice is ours). Yet Grasso's contribution above also illustrates a tendency apparent in a lot of work on television (most of which Grasso is very critical of), and this tendency is a 'confusion': more and more, less and less, a little bit more, a little bit less, reverberation, specular scams, mirror of the world but not quite, inventing the world but not really, wars that don't take place, towers that fall and look like films, collapsed realities, life on video, and the list goes on. A lot of literature focuses on the unreality of television having bled into our everyday, to the point where we cannot distinguish the true from the false; while this extreme simulacra version of events strikes me as both seductive and partly true, it doesn't *materially* account for experience. My

⁴⁰⁵ Grasso, Aldo. *Radio e Televisione: Teorie, Analisi, Storie, Esercizi*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000. p. 56

feeling, derived undoubtedly from my work on the New Spectacular but also from always having lived with these debates, is that the clashing of unreality and of reality operated in this Italian ‘advent’ has an effect which is altogether crueller: a conscious adherence to the fantasy, pricked all along by the thorns of the rose of reality.

Perniola once again comes into this debate, where he distinguishes between three stages in television, the second of which, the one that interests us here, takes place in the late 1970s and opens up the possibility of a ‘derealisation of reality’⁴⁰⁶; similarly, Alberto Abruzzese speaks of this phase as one which prepares for what he defines as post-television, which presents ‘a constant elsewhere’: ‘consumer TV has been the most clamorous cultural apparatus of late modernity. Television has been the most mature manifestation and expression of mass society; the most sophisticated system for the symbolic construction of reality (...)’⁴⁰⁷. Earlier he writes: ‘trash TV – the tele-selling of goods, of politics, of belief, of sex – is the very culture of a traumatic moment of transition’⁴⁰⁸. I am doing neither of these thinkers justice, for both of the systems they propose for thinking the transformations of television are evidently more complex than I have time to illustrate here. Yet I invite these voices into my host of interlocutors to illuminate once more how *this* moment, this moment of (maybe traumatic) transition generates a language which shows all the fault-lines of a difficulty, of a confusion regarding just how much this moment in television ‘takes away

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Derealisation’ makes appearances in Perniola’s work as early as 1980 in *La Società dei Simulacri*, but continues to evolve as a concept throughout his work. Interesting and more current turns of this concept in relation to the media can be found in two more recent books, the 2009 essay *Miracoli e Traumi della Comunicazione* (‘Miracles and Traumas of Communication’, Turin: Einaudi, 2009) and *Berlusconi, o il ’68 Realizzato* (‘Berlusconi, or ’68 realised’ Milan: Mimesis, 2011).

⁴⁰⁷ Abruzzese, Alberto. *L’intelligenza del mondo: fondamenti di storia e teoria dell’immaginario*. Rome: Meltemi, 2011. p. 250

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

reality’ and just how much it adds. It also produces a language in which the word ‘reality’ is constantly stretched, collapsed, dislocated, relocated; it is a language which, unless it chooses to settle unconditionally for the rhetoric of catastrophism, finds itself tied up in all the minute details and dilemmas of the unfinished simulacrum, of the blurry line, of the as yet undiagnosed side-effect: more than, not quite, different from, a little bit less.

Ortoleva’s ‘surreality’, seen briefly above, is another declination of these confusions, but in my view a more useful one for *what* we want to look at here, that is spectatorship, and for *how* we want to look at it – in terms, all things considered, not that abstract. This version, let it be noted, hangs on another of those expressions, which in this case is ‘just a little bit’:

... the era of so-called neo-television, which is the era of the advent of colour, is characterised by a large amount of messages made to be believed *just a little bit*: like the horoscope, which hardly anyone believes, but you never know...; like publicity, which affects our behaviour but which nobody would dream of taking literally (...) this ‘neo-television’ is perhaps the greatest ‘phantasmagoria’ that Italian society has spectated in these years: a universe which is truly surreal, and which can be partly transformed into real life through acts of consumption.⁴⁰⁹

Inhabitable, then: but up to a certain point. Or, inhabitable as long as we (literally) buy it, buy its products, make it real by performing acts of consumption. I find the proposal of ‘surreality’ provides a key with which to read this cultural moment particularly effective, because it seems to me to negotiate between affective dimensions: in fact it is precisely this *surreality* which allows for a critical gap in thinking about the televisual image, and which

⁴⁰⁹ Ortoleva, Peppino. *Un Ventennio a Colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia, 1975-95*. Milan: Giunti, 1995. p. 16

can also allow us to drag the technicolor spectre into the spectral real *par excellence* of the theatre. Surreality, in a sense, is in the *shadow* in as much as it is able to hold together confused entities: to participate, to return to Perniola, ‘in the pathology of religious experience’ and at the same time in ‘the technological imagination’⁴¹⁰. In fact, this idea of surreality of Ortoleva’s does more than this, because apart from affording the spectator a desiring yet conscious role in his/her *active* giving in and giving up, that ‘just a little bit’ has within it that background twang of nonetheness which is so important in the affective economy of this theatre and of this investigation.

This ‘surreality’ does not make the affective encounter with neo-television any less illusory, any less deceptive, or any less fraudulent: it does not undo, for example, Baudrillard’s view according to which capitalism, via television, replaces symbolic exchange with ‘the illusion of symbolic participation’⁴¹¹. What it does is lace this illusion with a consciousness, with a willingness: a consciousness and a willingness that matter for

⁴¹⁰ I return here to Mario Perniola’s reading of Benjamin’s 1935 *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century* in Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Translation Massimo Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004. p.66

⁴¹¹ William Merrin points out that Baudrillard’s views on symbolic exchange are inherited from Durkheim’s idea of symbolic gift exchange – an exchange which is tied to power but which leads to a communion and the emergence of the sacred when it is a state of balance. Durkheim’s idea of religion is one in which the ritual, in its weave of symbolic exchanges, brings the members of the community out of their individual isolation and into a state of collective ‘effervescence’. Merrin underlines how this is the base for Baudrillard’s idea of television: we cannot respond to it. It seduces us, it deflects us. Whereas the communities described by Durkheim responded to each other in symbolic gifts and hence reached a state of the sacred, the gift of the media (which is a way to gain power) is something we lack the means to give something back to – and this is how communication becomes excommunication. Merrin, William. ‘Television is Killing the Art of Symbolic Exchange: Baudrillard’s Theory of Communication’ in *Theory, Culture & Society* June 1999 vol. 16 no. 3 119-140. p. 125

spectatorship⁴¹². Because if, at this point in time and in this geographical space, neo-television is agitating the planes of reality and unreality so powerfully, this agitation plugs directly into the experiments which have their place in the theatre at this point in time and in this geographical space (and perhaps always, everywhere). This agitation plugs directly into Falso Movimento's video-theatre, into their chromakey backgrounds and jumps across buildings; it plugs directly into Barberio Corsetti's post-Gaia Scienza collaborations – Studio Azzurro's first sensible video-environments show simple but powerful gestures, such as that of placing a vase in front of a TV screen with the image of flowers, and watching them wither and come back to life, reversing death, performing a miracle⁴¹³.

There is something deeply seductive (and deeply convincing) about the surreality of colour, which is very similar to what is deeply seductive about the surreality of the

⁴¹² 'The spectator now becomes a subject of information and not merely the consumer of a communication; in fact the spectator already has a knowledge of every single element put into motion on stage, and knows with exactness the effects of the materials employed. The spectator cannot be influenced or tricked on the basis of what is being offered; rather, the spectator can be excited or depressed on the level of a loss of tension or of an acceleration, that is, only on the level of perceptual imagination'. Giuseppe Bartolucci 'Sulla Nuova Spettacolarità' in "Magazzini Criminali" February 1979. Cited by Sinisi, Silvana. *Dalla Parte dell'Occhio: Esperienze Teatrali in Italia 1972-1982*. Rome: Kappa, 1983. p. 61

⁴¹³ I refer here to the Studio Azzurro piece *Luci D'Inganni* (1982). Studio Azzurro later collaborated (1984-1987) with La Gaia Scienza's Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, making some of the most well-known of both Studio Azzurro's and Corsetti's works: *Prologo a Diario Segreto Contraffatto* (1985), *La Camera Astratta* (1986) and others. I want to say, in passing, that my belief is that here (that is, *later*, and really in one 'style' and one company) the New Spectacularity gets its label of 'media-theatre' and of 'Wilson type works'. These works look like Robert Wilson's. Earlier media-theatre works (Falso Movimento's, or Krypton's) didn't, actually, look like Robert Wilson's theatre at all. They looked, as Renfreu Neff wrote in reviewing them at La Mama in New York, much more 'fanciful', 'flashy' and 'Art Disco': 'These are some of the most popular representatives of Italy's "Nuovo Spettacolorita" or "Mediatheatre", a movement started in the late 70s by groups of people in their early twenties, who came from architectural and fine arts backgrounds. Their influences were television and cinema. Their names seemed more appropriate for rock bands than for theatre companies (...) [The quest for an aesthetic that synthesises media and theatre] is a quest in which process is often more interesting than result, where the highly energized atmosphere, saturated with aural and visual bombardment and mood swings of disco and rock concerts, evokes in the spectator the irony of it all: hi-tech nostalgia with no sweat at all'. Neff, Renfreu. 'Benvenuto: New York-Italy by Falso Movimento; Krypton; La Gaia Scienza' *PAJ*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1984), pp. 87-91.

inhabitation of the ‘world’ of the theatre: the ‘promise’ that, through the quasi-ritualistic performance of a series of gestures, a world that is radically *other* but so similar it *feels* believable can be open to being entered, open to being dwelled within. Believing ‘just a little bit’ could look like a trivial gesture, or like a gesture of cowardice, or indecision – and perhaps it is. Yet a television filled with the invitation to just-a-little-bit-ness (‘more everyday’, ‘this world is yours, you know’) has powerful consequences. It may only open the door ajar, but once the door is open, what does it matter if it’s ajar? If you can enter for a second, then maybe you can enter for an hour, for a year, for a life. If you can go in and out as you please, then perhaps one day ‘this world’ *will* be yours. I am reminded of Tondelli’s Adriatic panorama: ‘if someone had travelled the whole of that road, the whole length of it, without ever coming off it, maybe they would have really lived the dream. At the condition of never veering one way or the other. After all, as Susy had said earlier, the trick was minor, and mundane. “You just have to believe it”, she had said. (...) It worked. Even I had become a prisoner of it. Believing it was irresistible to me’⁴¹⁴.

⁴¹⁴ Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Rimini*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985. p. 43

Consumers, Consuming, Consumed:
The Antonio Syxty Fan Club and the Fake

I'm in a photocopy and fax shop in a well-to-do, residential area of Milan, and it's January 2012. There's a queue: students collecting theses. I get given control over two machines, one black and white and one colour, because I've made so many trips, every time with a different box or folder, that the man running the shop thinks it best to leave me to my private photocopying and get on with the rest of the customers. There's a series of photographs with coloured tape stuck onto them, and I ask for high definition copies of those. There's a series of faded typewritten manuscripts, and I ask for higher contrast for those. He calls a younger employee to help me, and he does – he worries about the corners, makes sure nothing gets bent or folded, handles some of the tissue-thin papers gently, takes his time to get me the perfect scan.

I, however, am running out of time: I have a flight booked for the following afternoon. I have spent a week going through boxes with Syxty, having each sheet of paper explained, and making notes about all the documents that seem to be worthy of interest. We have sorted the reviews from the writings, the programme notes from the birth certificates, the private correspondence from the funding letters. All along, two anxieties haunt me: the anxiety of missing something, and the anxiety of disturbing the archive. Although we've adopted a practical approach and decided to impose a certain order 'since we're doing it anyway', I am extremely conscious of myself as first intruder, and would like to leave things in the silent disorder I found them in. I keep my fingerprints to a minimum. I write a couple of post-its for conservation purposes: things like 'this is the only copy of this'. I stuff some of the

inappropriately placed documents back into the archive to keep some of the disorder intact, although Syxty doesn't want me to. As I close the boxes on the morning of the last day, I take a deep breath as I think in horror of all the other traces I have probably left in the archive from these days of conversation. I feel deeply intrigued by what I have read and seen, and at moments have been in love with what I have found and imagined. I fear that my love, my imagination and my intrigue may have rubbed onto the pages, like my perfume which most certainly has.

While I perform the mechanical gesture of photocopying, a third anxiety presents itself, and it regards the category which I have been working with all along: 'all the documents that seem worthy of interest'. This is a methodological anxiety, of course, and while I do not know in the moment quite how deep these waters are going to run (though I do know that methodological waters run deep), I catch a glimpse of the future of this project. I remember, as I keep photocopying, looking outside the shop window at nervous students sucking on cigarettes, that in applying for this research I had used that sentence from Bartolucci, 'the Italian avant-garde is riding into the sunset'⁴¹⁵, and that I had qualified it like this: I want to know what that sunset looked like, and how that riding felt. I always knew that, in order to do this, I would have to look at more than the theatre, and that I myself would have to understand and feel beyond the theatre, into whatever trace I was offered for my affective historiography.

There's a hairdressers on the other side of the road and, still photocopying, I look at the women in the hairdressers. I find myself thinking, naturally, about the fixation for hair and beauty present in Syxty's work, about how brands of cosmetics and clothing are painstakingly

⁴¹⁵ Bartolucci, Giuseppe. 'The Post Avant-Garde: An Autointerview' *TDR*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Italian Theatre Issue (Mar., 1978), pp. 103-107

listed for each and every piece. About the dress Gaia Calimani, Syxty's collaborator and partner, was wearing for dinner the night before, a black cocktail dress with a bare back. And, of course, about *Nuova Zelanda*, a performance dedicated to a shade of lipstick. Revlon's pink-fuchsia, to be precise⁴¹⁶. This is something I had always found strange: Revlon's pink-fuchsia. The most intriguing aspect of lipstick, for me, has always been the names cosmetic companies give to their shades of lipstick: names of cities and places (*Cannes*, *St Moritz*, *Coromandel*...), names of flowers paired with non-botanical adjectives (*Hot Geranium*, say, or *Rebel Rose*), names of very abstract, or indeed very concrete entities that paired with the colour give way to a certain desiring universe (*Vertigo*, or *Modesty*, but equally *Photo* or *Boy*).

Nuova Zelanda is dedicated to a colour, not to a name, but the effect is the same – a concentrate of desire⁴¹⁷. The lipstick name, the concept of the *Copertina*, the magazine cover which Syxty also worked on, the 30-second advert that is the subject of *Ragazze 81*, a performance I will discuss later: these are products responsible for dragging the consumer into an imagined, desired world and of doing so quickly, immediately, powerfully – only like this can the transaction take place. In fact, even their 'use' is probably secondary compared to the fantasy they speak to: after all, you hardly ever get to see the lipstick you're wearing. Now, *this* universal cosmesis is not only a question of depth of the superficial: it hinges also on an understanding that everything counts. In Syxty's work, and indeed in most Neo-Spectacular

⁴¹⁶ The programme notes for *Nuova Zelanda* have a section for 'dedications': 'to the Maori populations of New Zealand and to the pink-fuschia shade of lipstick made by Revlon and used in the performance *Eloise*, *Vento Leggero*, *Eloise*'. Reprinted in Bertoldo, Mino. *OutOff: 1978-2008*. Milan: Ed. OutOff, p. 109.

⁴¹⁷ Programme notes for *Ragazze 81*. Ibid. p. 114. I add here that in the Winter of 2013/14 I decided to leave no stone unturned and check with Revlon whether there had been a pink-fuschia *called* *Eloise*. Ashley, the woman I spoke to from the Revlon archives, assures me that Revlon's titles have always contained the name of the colour, so 'Eloise' is impossible.

work, everything counts. Shades of lipstick count. I realise that the only way I can gather pulviscule is to give in to my own sense that everything counts historically: that nothing, not even a shade of lipstick should be overlooked, because these are precisely the things that often are overlooked and make moments that are different *feel* the same. And I realise that without dwelling on these ‘cosmetic’ details, I cannot even come close to my (already impossible) investigative promise to know how the riding felt. In light of this, I decide to disregard my list of notes and to copy everything I can. And that’s why I’m running out of time.

The new list (the new heap) includes not only all the unhappened (such as *Gas Station* and a few others), but also a series of documents relating to events, publications, projects that I know nothing about and that, seemingly, Syxty cannot remember much about either. It also includes a number of pieces Syxty has invited me to disregard as silly, or failed, or unimportant. He is impressed by some of the things he had forgotten about, unimpressed by others, and laughs at almost all of them. A delirious biography in which he chronicles, amongst other things, all of his performance failures at high school tickles him a great deal⁴¹⁸. Syxty and I both are trying to negotiate between what matters and what doesn’t; I conclude that neither of us knows.

Pirandello’s *The Man with the Flower in his Mouth* is playing at Litta, directed by Syxty. This means that he is often busy and I have time to conserve, analyse and dwell upon the fragment, the detail. As I become intellectually engrossed with and seduced by the questions *Gas Station* poses to me, and as I become increasingly caught up in a set of Chinese boxes of science-fictional conversations with its author, I sometimes even convince myself

⁴¹⁸ This is *Biografia di Antonio Syxty*, written around the time of Nuova Zelanda. Unpublished archival material.

that none of it ever took place, that even the newspaper reviews are fabrications. Other times I think Syxty might be telling me that performances that did happen didn't, and that for some reason he wants them swept under the carpet. Perhaps they're *copies*, I think to myself. I get entangled in a classic game of who-did-that-first between Syxty and Magazzini Criminali. I am confused and amused by interviews with critics, in which Syxty interviews the critics ('do you think that since this fictive interview takes place in a hotel we can classify it as a case of tourist theatre?'⁴¹⁹). I am puzzled by letters to fashion designers, to embassies, to travel agents, asking for help, information, money. Did he really send them all? Are these copies? They aren't copies. Did he send a copy and keep the original? Did he type up two? Why?

I notice that Merit cigarettes are the 'official sponsor' of *Famiglia Horror*. I wonder how on earth he got Merit to fund *Famiglia Horror*. He explains that he asked and they obliged, that he said Merits would have been smoked on stage, that they thought it was a much more glamorous affair than it was: that he had half-lied to get the funding, and so be it, after all they *are* the devil. I am full of questions. I can never get enough answers, enough stories, enough detail. I feverishly piece together dates, times, people, cities. I realise that all the unhappened occupies a category worthy of the same care as the happened, and that maybe I'm not even concerned in singling out the 'real' from the 'false'; in truth, I am unequipped to even do so, since we are talking of performance, and who am I to draw the lines? After all, I am a spectator who has always liked her lines as muddled as possible, and this archive may be completely staged. After all, he knew I was coming.

A couple of mornings before I leave, I walk into Litta and am greeted by a particularly

⁴¹⁹ This is an interview with Giuseppe Bartolucci in the Motel Agip in Rome on the Via Aurelia. Unpublished archival material. True? False? Who knows.

gleeful Antonio Syxty. He is overjoyed because amongst the folders he had found his first driving license, issued on the Isle of Wight. He shows it to me triumphantly: over lunch a few days earlier he had told me stories from the Isle of Wight in the mid-1970s, about the characters he met, the situations he got himself into, his job as a waiter in an Italian restaurant, and about how he learned to drive there, on the other side of the road. Although I never meant to, I must have given him the impression that I didn't believe him – my facial expression must have shown how amusing and odd I found the whole narration, and he must have read it as disbelief. The driving license is waved in front of me as a piece of evidence, and I am asked to scrutinise it, to check that it's real – as if it proved that despite all our conversations about fakes, all his games and provocations, all his false interviews and letters, all of his performances that didn't happen, he *was* telling me the truth. I could tell he didn't trust me at all as I repeated that I had never thought he was lying, and why would I think he was lying about the Isle of Wight driving license, anyway? I want to tell him very clearly: I'll believe anything!

•

In London, later, I have time to read things properly. I have time to read this, for example, handwritten, and sent to the Antonio Syxty Fan Club in the June of 1980:

Hello Antonio! My name is Cristina, I have black hair and eyes, or rather dark dark brown, and I'm 1.65m tall, if I wear heels I can look tall, but never taller than 1.75m. Like you, I love travelling. It's easy to find me in railway stations, with my backpack and my guitar; my closest friend, she comes everywhere with me. We also have the same taste in music:

Police, Kiss, Ramones and Cheap Tricks. I'd like to know more about the fan club you've founded, it seems really interesting. I hope to have found a friend (you). To start, let me tell you some things about my life.

(...)

*An unrealisable dream: to become invisible. I believe in the horoscope, I love animals and good-looking boys. I dream to meet the man of my life. Realisable dream: to live an adventure on a desert, tropical island with a gorgeous boy. I hope I haven't bored you with my letter, and I'm looking forward to your answer. You won't find me in August, though: I'll be travelling the world. Send me your photo [drawn star] my hobbies are music and collecting photos of boys. I'll send you my photo next time (...)*⁴²⁰

I must confess that I am surprised – perhaps I shouldn't be – as I notice that I too, although I come in as a scholar thirty years later, find myself entangled in Syxty's mechanisms. I am used to these letters, I have handled them for a couple of years, and now that it comes to quoting them I have changed the identity of the writer: Cristina is not her real name, and apart from the names of performers, I make sure that whenever I write about Syxty none of the names of girls and boys who wrote to the fan club appear. I have reason to believe that some of the correspondence between Syxty and Cristina was published, in some sort of photo-story format, in the pages of the girls' magazine *Lancio Story*⁴²¹; but I have not seen the magazine, and cannot be sure of what sort of document exactly this letter is. Is it 'a real'? Is it a fake? How much did Cristina know, and who is Cristina, where is she now? The handwriting, the drawn stars and hearts, the language looks and feels *so real* – this has to be,

⁴²⁰ Letter sent to the Antonio Syxty Fan Club. Unpublished archival material.

⁴²¹ I get my reason for believing that correspondence between Cristina and Syxty was published because the event is mentioned in Capitta, Gianfranco. 'La Vera Storia del Fidanzato di Barbie', an article which appeared in *La voce di Como* in the May of 1980 (?).

in one way or another, the writing of a teenage girl. I doubt that it is Syxty's writing although, from other manuscripts, I couldn't completely put it past him. So if it *is* a fake, is Cristina herself purposefully writing a fake? In any case, the dreams and feelings of a 16-year old should be handled with kid gloves: all I *really* know is that all Cristina did was write to a fan club. I imagine she did so in good faith. I imagine she never expected a performance researcher to be reading her letter. The naiveté in the letter is palpable, and precious. She probably never expected it to be read at all. But it was, has been, is still, right now.

'Antonio Syxty Fan Club' is a name given to a range of entities between 1978 and 1982 approximately. In the beginning, it is simply a company name, the name of the troupe: Syxty, who had always been a solo artist, used this idea of the 'fan club' to refer to the people working with him, as if to say 'entourage' – an entourage which glorifies Syxty, made up of his 'fans'. It appeared as Syxty phased out the 'movement' name 'Oh! Art', the label under which his mid and late 1970s happenings were billed – a movement, it must be noted, which consisted effectively of Syxty himself and nobody else, and whose influences were openly Duchampian⁴²² (for Syxty, everything begins with Duchamp, with a history of art book found in the school library). We must remember here that the name Syxty is of course also a fake, one which winks at the 1960s but spells it with two ys to be even more 'modern', and that Syxty spent the years in question here cultivating an image of himself which was a hybrid between person and persona, changing names and appearance often, dressing up, working as a model, as a performance artist and as a journalist for *La Voce di Como*, the Como-based

⁴²² I refer here to the performances *WM, o di alcuni tentativi di salare il sale e di attraversare un muro* (Como, 1977) and *Ingredients: five holes and three rings waterproof* (Milan, 1978), amongst others. It's quite interesting to note that another pseudonym appears on these, 'Illy Lasà'.

Communist Party newspaper, where he had a strange weekly column entitled *Syxyne* in which he signed himself, very bizarrely, as ‘Dandy Rose’. He was photographed all the time: articles about a season, or about a festival, or about a scene would sport a photograph of Syxty as the image. Gianfranco Capitta wrote an article about ‘the true story of Barbie’s girlfriend’⁴²³, another myth circulated by Syxty – here, as well as in a number of other articles, Syxty is commented on for how young he looks, for how dandyish he is, for how eccentrically he dresses. As Syxty himself states in an interview in the programme notes for *Kennedyne*, ‘in Milan I’m super-famous. I have a fan club and girls write me letters, they want to meet me, they say they’re in love with me. Creating the myth of yourself is so easy these days: all you need is a bit of money and three months’ time’⁴²⁴.

Although there was, in effect, no connection between circuits such as the Out-Off basement theatre in Milan, where Syxty made most of his works, and circuits such as girl magazines like *Cioé* and *Lancio Story*, the two are bound to each other in Syxty’s early theatre-world. The fan club evolved into a ‘real’ fan club advertised in the back pages of such magazines, and was used by Syxty as a kind of field for research: it allowed him to collect the voices of teenagers. The English expression used in Italian, ‘fan club’, isn’t quite correct, because it was more akin to what in English we would call a pen-pal club: the advertisements promise to put you in touch with like-minded boys and girls. The letters all state that the writers want to ‘talk about their problems’, ‘meet people who like the same music’, ‘collect photos of boys’ etc. Often the insertions must have carried some detail about the shows Syxty

⁴²³ Capitta, Gianfranco. ‘La Vera Storia del Fidanzato di Barbie’. In *La voce di Como*, May 1980.

⁴²⁴ Syxty, Antonio, interviewed by Linda De Santis. In *Il Messaggero*, 23rd January 1981. The interview is partially published in the programme notes for *Nuova Zelanda* in the Out Off Catalogue. p. 113

was making, because the letters reference the show in question; most of them are from around the time of the making of *Nuova Zelanda*, and the classified ad must have said so, because a number of them confusedly state that they want to know more about it, or that they don't know much about it apart from the fact that they would love to go there.

The Antonio Syxty Fan Club *is* a fake, in a sense: behind it was not a celebrity, nor a teenager, nor a 'real' pen-pal service, and Syxty hardly ever answered. It is also real, because it looks like the bulk of the letters are real, as are the people who wrote them. I shall return to this. For now, I want to note how, at least in the case of *Nuova Zelanda*, the fan club serves the purpose of a means of accumulation of impressions, reverie, questions of teenagers, mostly of teenage girls, and hence of a section of society that existed quite clearly apart from the lifestyles this theatre was being made by and in. *Nuova Zelanda* took place in a club on the outskirts of Milan, and it would have probably been impossible for most members of the fan club to travel to see it, let alone to get in. Nevertheless, Syxty seemed intent on making 'tourist theatre', and this operation relied on a sort of unadulterated (quite literally not-made-adult) inquiring voice. Alongside the materials from the fan club, the notebooks for *Nuova Zelanda* contain fragments of dead Maori languages, photographs of hotels, tour schedules for package holidays, and playfully uninformed curiosities about cannibalistic rituals. The show itself, from Syxty's stories of it, was part glamorous holiday, part tribal dances, part military parade, with a relatively well-known Milanese new wave band playing live on stage, while the action happened on the dancefloor.

It is on the wave of the Fan Club and alongside it that the performances I want to bring into discussion here, *Ragazze* and *Ragazze 81*, exist. Again Syxty calls in other voices, and

does so by way of advertising that will reach beyond the experimental theatre circles. In fact, it seems as if around 1981 the very idea of the experimental theatre circles is beginning to fade from view and from importance in the larger economy of Syxty's work, although it will return later. For a moment the young girl, indeed the *ragazza*, isn't only being called in to be the performer, she's being called in to be the *performance* and its audience as well, the audience of herself.

Zooming out for second, it is interesting to note when these performances take place, also because a large number of works happen all at once, between 1980 and 1981: the two *Ragazze* pieces happen in the immediate aftermath of *Eloise*, a time populated by a string of other shows including the aforementioned *Kennedyne* and *Nuova Zelanda*, and just before a show called *Copertine: dallo Story-Board al Teatro* ('Magazine Covers: from the Storyboard to the Theatre'). It is easy to let Syxty's own self-promotional attitude as *bambolo* ('male doll'), party boy and cover boy cloud one's critical vision here, making the whole two years look like one long party, but in effect the development of ideas that appears in this period carries quite a crystalline conceptual triangulation between America (first phase), the concept of the actor-model (second phase) and the cover magazine (third phase). It is as if the process were, once again, a process of reduction, of *concentration*, from atmosphere to surface: as if *Eloise*'s soft breeze made all the pulviscule settle on the cover of the fashion magazine. Earlier, we saw how she was locked in a video-box; now she's locked in a still glossy image: in a sense, here we inhabit *Eloise*'s new apartments.

Ragazze and *Ragazze 81* could be counted, and should be counted, as two passages in the process of what in other instances I have called *affective reduction*. I choose to concentrate

on them because they mark a particularly significant step in this flattening process, existing at the intersection between what I see as Syxty's three principal questions: the question of Eloise as allegorical figure, whose nature we have seen in *Gas Station*; the question of the fake, which we will return to; the question of the concentrate, which in Syxty ends up in the magazine cover and in the 30-second advert, syntheses of atmosphere and desire.

•

ATTENTION! Communiqué for RAGAZZE! 1981. All girls aged between 12 and 18 are invited to participate in a theatrical-cinematographical audition in Como on 12 and 13 May at 15.00 at CINEMA EMBASSY (P.zza del Popolo). Photographers, TV, radio, critics, journalists, film directors etc will be present. For further information call OUT-OFF (MILAN) 02.663595⁴²⁵

The text above appeared as a poster in and around Como in the Spring of 1981, and it is the base of the performance *Ragazze!*. The show was a two-day audition – it didn't have a theatre audience, apart from perhaps those who knew and were interested in having a look, and no performative mechanism, no tricks, no final revelation can justly allow us to classify it as a piece of theatre. Yet, since it was in effect an audition for the sake of an audition, then perhaps it *is* a performance: a performance of girls to themselves. The process apparently took all afternoon, guided by Syxty who stood in the middle of the room and dispensed instructions to the girls, to the make-up artists, to the photographers. The girls' names were called, and they were asked to go on stage and perform a series of gestures, like drinking a glass of water or pretending to answer a telephone. There's the script in the archive of things to read out:

⁴²⁵ ³ Communiqué / poster for RAGAZZE! 1981. Archival material.

Who can it be? But the intercom buzzed! I'm certain the intercom buzzed!
Hi, Carlo, I've been waiting a while, how come you're so late?

or

Mum, I'm so tired of living in this house, within these four walls, I'm leaving.
*I've finally decided, I'm leaving!*⁴²⁶

They also answer questions about themselves; questions regarding their hopes and ambitions, questions about their favourite drink and favourite colour. *Ragazze* is, to all intents and purposes, an audition; it is also, to all intents and purposes, a fake. The girls are tricked into believing they really are at an audition, or why would they have come? Syxty writes in his notes that he is interested in the idea of the 'cavalcade of the teenagers' and that populating his thinking are films such as *They Shoot Horses Don't They?*: the pointless, aimless suffering of showbiz⁴²⁷. He is interested in that word, *Ragazze!*, sounding like a call to arms; and he is interested in making theatre for teenage girls, and if that means staging a fake audition, so be it. Yet the strangest aspect of *Ragazze*, the effect that makes strange the operation, is perhaps that the girls aren't asked to 'do' anything, to showcase any kind of talent, to dance or sing. They are asked to talk, mostly; they never hear back.

Ragazze 81 is a different affair, with a similar mechanism. While for *Ragazze* a degree

⁴²⁶ Script for *Ragazze!* Unpublished archival material.

⁴²⁷ Syxty, Antonio. Presentation of the project for *Ragazze!* Unpublished archival material. The fact that Sydney Pollack's 1969 film, bearing the strapline 'people are the ultimate spectacle', fascinated Syxty is quite interesting to me because, perhaps, it tells us something about the 'tone' of *Ragazze*, which there are no tapes of and which, hence, I find harder to access than other Neo-Spectacular works: the film, which stages an American dance-marathon ending in assisted suicide, has a grotesque aspect to it. Grotesque and very darkly critical. The idea of the happy-go-lucky dance marathon producing a despair which longs for suicide (Jane Fonda implores 'help me'), seems to me to play a part in the world of the unhappy consciousness, and adds a layer of horror to Syxty's 'games'.

of trickery had to be involved, the girls in this performance, Sonia Lozej and Bettina Gozzano, two girls in their mid-teens with modelling ambitions found via a magazine advert in October 1980, were supposedly let into the mechanisms of the game more than the ‘cavalcade’ at Cinema Embassy. It is, still, hard to single out to what extent: they were invited to a private TV-studio near Naples which had been hired out for the occasion. Here, inhabiting the electrifying space of private television, in front of a live audience, they were to shoot a fashion commercial. The performance is much the same as *Ragazze!*, with more posing, more outfit changes, more conversation. Furthermore, it was filmed, as a *conditio sine qua non*; although it was filmed, once again, to be broadcast nowhere; and the film, alas, is lost. Let us turn to Syxty’s writing about the piece:

Those who know my work should realise that I’m not trying to ironise on or critique the world of fashion: on the contrary, I am interested in the extreme synthesis achieved in a 30-second advert – the transfiguration of the real into this synthetic form – a form which is also, decidedly, cathartic.⁴²⁸

What seems to interest and fascinate Syxty, then, is the concentrate of desire achieved through advertising: the cathartic 30 seconds of falling into the image, of the all consuming image, thirty seconds which purify and pollute simultaneously: an intoxication. Made in the vacuum of the studio, away from the maddening crowds and from audience participation, *Ragazze 81*, first of all, can’t have been as much ‘fun’ as the event in Como (there’s a photo of the piece in which everyone seems a little bored, sitting on armchairs looking at magazines); secondly, it is all the more ‘useless’, its make-believe pushed to its outermost limits. Another

⁴²⁸ Syxty, Antonio. Programme notes for *Ragazze 81*. Published in Bertoldo, Mino. OutOff: 1978-2008. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008. p. 114

new effect, compared with its previous incarnation, is that the space of the television studio (the local, ten-a-penny television studio: the banal television studio) is a space of reflection rather than a space of euphoria – paradoxically, perhaps, it also becomes a space to reflect on the theatre: what determines its ‘uselessness’, as Syxty calls it, is what determines its very theatricality: it is ephemeral, off-air, cathartic.

Yet this doesn’t seem to be ‘television at the theatre’, rather a strange mixture of the two. It is the gestures of television in the space of television but experienced as theatre: the impression that millions might be watching blended in with the certainty that only around forty or fifty are watching. The performance also fuses the timing of theatre with the timing of television: a television audience, essentially, waits – whether for filming to resume, for the adverts to end, for an applause to happen, or for a camera to land on them; in any case it exists in ‘everyday’ time, with the constraints and the voids of everyday time. But a theatre audience watches, without, generally, the expectation or the desire to be watched and it watches ‘out of time’, in another place and time. The space in which the mechanisms of theatre are meshed with the mechanisms of television strikes me as a particularly intriguing spectating experience, certainly an instance of redefinition of space – the affective, atmospherical space – of the spectator.

Within this estranging frame, it seems as if what *Ragazze 81* was supposed to do was to set itself up as a study in televisual marketing and end up as an exercise in theatrical make-believe. The idea that fuels it is the very weakness of make-believe, that romantic desire to ‘fall into’ those 30 seconds of catharsis, the idea – central to all Neo-Spectacular practices – of the theatre as elsewhere. It studies how to do it, yes, as an intellectual project – *but then it*

does it, and therein, I suppose, lies its ‘surprise’: although it illuminates the structures, it keeps intact the headiness supplied by the work those structures do. Syxty learns the gestures of banal televisual capitalism and stages them as merely gestures. The audience members, who I imagine were well-versed in those banal languages, do the rest of the work (maybe in spite of themselves) – deducing, feeling the swirl of the void of that particular breed of televisual banal⁴²⁹.

Once again, although we could argue that a typically postmodern reading is offered, from a certain angle, by the fibre of the piece itself, we have to be mindful of its ‘off-postmodernism’ in order to acknowledge the affective agenda of the show, and its interaction with the grand récit. *Ragazze 81* could be seen as a media-frenzied operation of appropriation, assimilations of style, pastiche. But can we be sure its light heartedness isn’t betraying it? I suggest it may be more useful to interpret the piece as a deep investigation into the mechanics of images and their inter-relation, faced this time with a newly found lexicon for what is a long formed, ancient, process of making and unmaking desire. Pushing the scope of the piece further still, it could even be seen as an exercise in resistance: there is a will in *Ragazze 81* to not only adopt and make one’s own the dynamics agitating the technique of promotional image and its discontents, but also to ‘interfere’ with those dynamics, with that given (commercial) order. As such, the piece seems to me to ask a fundamental question regarding the where and the who of those ‘synthetic’ and ‘cathartic’ concentrates of desire: who is

⁴²⁹ Carlo Infante wrote in *Scena*: ‘Syxty plays an advert director (which is what he would really like to do), he arranges the cameras, he points the lenses at the models who he interviews. He prefers the models to be lying on their side like Paolina Bonaparte as they get their make-up done by the make-up artist, or to be singing songs (things like Nikka Costa) in some pose or other. It’s all fake, too fake, so fake it looks real. It’s the exaggeration of the plasticky world of fashion, of advertising, of cosmesis and frozen smiles’. Infante, Carlo, quoted in Bertoldo, Mino. *OutOff: 1978-2008*. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008. p. 115

allowed to mess with the (spectacular) grand récit those systems bring about? Who is allowed to interfere with the underlying structures keeping together a certain image order?⁴³⁰

By way of their own presence the two young girls – Sonia Lozej and Bettina Gozzano – interfere with this order also, because even by merely being there they seem to me to supply the disturbances of the fake/real body in the ‘copied’ make-believe. By this I mean that Lozej and Gozzano could be seen as ‘automatically’ enacting a whole series of conundrums for the spectator: they are ‘real’ in a ‘realistic’ but ‘fake’ setting; they are their ‘real’ age but we are not sure whether they are wholly conscious of the joke; they remind us that we don’t really know what we are watching – historically, even less so.

The final scene of *Ragazze 81*, anticipating Syxty's symbolic suicide⁴³¹, is a photo shoot in which the *ragazze* drag in a bag of toys, wear Mickey Mouse T-Shirts and ‘look sad and

⁴³⁰ Something which has often occurred to me is the possibility of seeing Syxty's work (and not only – Sanzio's, very powerfully) as instances of what Slavoj Žižek calls, from Lacan, ‘overidentification’. His first uses of the term, à propos Laibach and the NSK movement, occur in a 1993 article entitled ‘Why are Laibach and the NSK not fascists?’. I would like to confront this topic much more deeply, but for now I will quote a passage of the article and illustrate a couple of thoughts afterwards: ‘in the process of disintegration of socialism in Slovenia, they [Laibach and the NSK] staged an aggressive inconsistent mixture of Stalinism, Nazism, and Blut und Boden ideology. The first reaction of the enlightened Leftist critics was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support of Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: “What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?” - or, a more cunning version of it, transferring one's own doubt onto the other: “What if Laibach overestimates their public? What if the public takes seriously what Laibach mockingly imitates, so that Laibach actually strengthens what it purports to undermine?” This uneasy feeling is fed on the assumption that ironic distance is automatically a subversive attitude’ (Žižek, Slavoj. ‘Why are Laibach and the NSK not fascists?’ *M'ARS* Volume 3/4. Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija). My question is whether the undoing of an ironic distance in all the work referred to here may have been attempting similar political strategies not with the residues of Self-Management, of course, but with the rapid post-industrialisation of Italy at this time. Could what Ponte di Pino terms ‘mimesis’ be in effect a form of late-capitalist overidentification? Could herein lie some of the thorns in the discourse between Italian intellectuals and Italian postmodernity? Or, could we even extend the sway of an overidentification to Italian culture at this time in general? Does this answer Ceserani's question about ‘the new mood’? Were there ever ironic playful distances in Italy after all? These questions would like to be some of the future of the work.

⁴³¹ Syxty hangs himself on stage at the end of *Ragazze 81*. This scene is described in some detail by Italo Moscati, who reviewed the event for women's magazine *Amica*, and whose conclusion is: ‘but why? What's wrong with organising a little theatrical fashion show?’. Moscati, Italo. Review of *Ragazze 81* in *Amica*, 1st September 1981.

afraid'⁴³², disturbing the relatively relaxed and 'realistic' flow of the piece and illuminating the possibility of their own exploitation. Although there is a trend, at this moment in Italy, for the young girl as child, a taste for that fresh-faced ingenuity which was so fashionable then, it is a trend which – as soft-core moves firmly into pre-watershed – also heralds the girl-child's (imminent) sexualisation. Syxty's overtly unsophisticated, vaguely horror-film tableau of hanging himself as two sixteen year olds pose forlornly in Mickey Mouse T-shirts darkens the spectacle, finishes it on a note of disturbance, of signal interference, of television snow. The lights go up, the audience leaves, the dream/nightmare appears to be over: the theatre, dressed up as television, has done its trick – we have fallen in love with the image and fallen into mistrust of our desire. The ending of *Ragazze 81* could very well be the same as the ending of *Gas Station*: all that remains is a long kiss between the artists and the cyclone, between actor-author and theatre-territory.

•

In his article 'Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy', published in the proceedings from *Paesaggio Metropolitano*, Paolo Landi gathers his thoughts about Syxty around the conceptual core of 'the fake' as displayed in performances such as these⁴³³. The article synthesises well what many critics were writing in newspapers at this time, because it is fuelled by (and quite preoccupied by) the mechanisms of Syxty's work as alluring, fun and happy-go-lucky on the one hand and as make-believe fakes on the other. Having read almost every available

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Landi, Paolo. 'Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy' in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 236-238.

newspaper clipping or article about Syxty at this time, my sense is that while of course the work was fun as a spectatorial experience, it was work that ‘fell down’ in its *falling for itself*: when Syxty’s work becomes the object of intellectual dismissal or of conceptual or political suspicion for his critics, it does so because it appears to believe its own make-believe, to acritically buy the very fantasy (the empty fantasy) it stages. The difficulty exists always in the absence of an unravelling of the fiction, in the lack of a final exposure, in absence of a *denouement*, of an admittance to the fake. As such, Syxty is often accused of not knowing his own boundaries – and from what I have learned from his work, I can say that perhaps it is true, perhaps he didn’t. He is charged with providing no substance in the in-between; with making no real conceptual commentary or contribution; with being delusional and providing only pineapple juice and smiles⁴³⁴, ‘sick with Americanism and interested only in success⁴³⁵’. Sometimes this frivolity was, to an extent, defended. Franco Cordelli wrote that Syxty’s signals were ‘red lights flashing in the night, but if you read them closely you can intercept the beginning of a discourse’⁴³⁶.

Synthesising these voices, Landi writes that the primary concern in Syxty’s work is

⁴³⁴ After the opening of the 1980 season of OutOff, a ‘performance-catwalk-smiles’ by Antonio Syxty called *Boom Blast*, *Il Giorno* wrote that the event boiled down to ‘declared mundanity, models, smiles and papaya juice’ (which was exactly what Syxty and OutOff set out to do). Mino Bertoldo, who directed OutOff and who was then in a sense responsible for the (very many) public outings of Syxty’s production, made a very interesting comment in response, on 15th December 1980 in *Panorama*: ‘[opening with papaya and catwalks] is the best way to finally be done with the ambiguities of the underground which persist from twenty years ago, and to end it with the bad faith of those who would like to relegate the invention of new languages to only a chosen few’. Democratisation of the experimental. And yes the OutOff was a basement, underneath a large block of council housing at 8, Viale Montesanto near Metro Repubblica, Milan (it has now been demolished).

⁴³⁵ Roberto Agostini, who used to write for the newspaper *Il Manifesto* and for the magazine *Panorama*, was amongst the critics who had the most fun with Syxty. On *Nuova Zelanda*, in 1981, he wrote in *Il Manifesto* that ‘his adverts are scrunched up, his sequins are faded: he can’t do it’. Earlier (16th July 1979) he had written an article in which he spoke of Syxty’s performances as ‘images in vogue style performing a cruel exhibitionism, a repressed violence, and an alarming idiocy’.

⁴³⁶ Cordelli, Franco. ‘L’Immaginario sociale di Sixty, Cover Boy’ in *Paese Sera*, 22nd January 1981.

‘falsification, which is different from the ideology of the surface which exists in many of the metropolitan groups. Syxty’s fakes are in no way demonstrative, they explain nothing apart from the repetitive and useless mechanism of a game’⁴³⁷. He continues by noting that, nevertheless, between object and parody there is – or there is supposed to be – a gap: ‘there *has* to be a gap. In the 1960s we became well-versed in the operations of pop art: but there, there was an in-between, a place where artistic creation happened, between the object and its copy (...) the risk is to end up coinciding with the very universe which obsesses and assimilates us’⁴³⁸.

What if the gap – rather than being the gap where artistic creation happens – were the gap where desire happens? Once again, I urge us to flip perspective, and leave behind for a moment the learned automatisms and free-for-alls of early 1980s chaotica. I propose we substitute the 1960s gap of artistic production (genius?) with an analytic, self-reflexive (yet somehow collective) gap of awareness of desire, tied inextricably and fatally to a deeper knowledge of the mechanics of images: a voluntary ‘falling into’, another movement in the ‘intense aesthetic experience’ of the metropolitan. The will to *mettre en scène* the image of what is already just an image in *Gas Station* marks the first moment in Syxty’s process of – and this is the expression for it – *feeling his way* through a series of desires and choosing performance as the locus in which to project the shadows of those desires. Shadows that vary – in length, in reach and in darkness.

In Syxty’s shadows the structures of thinking and feeling, or more specifically the

⁴³⁷ Landi, Paolo. ‘Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy’ in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 237

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

longing for those structures, intercepted in much of the production of the New Spectacular groups find what is in my view one of their most sincere incarnations (too sincere perhaps) as what Barthes refers to as *second degree myths*, because it is work which is able to take seriously and offer fully the realm of connotation after (or without) denotation, indeed a sort of second degree: ‘there is an erotic, an aesthetic of the second degree. We can even become maniacs of the second degree; reject denotation, spontaneity, platitude, innocent repetition, tolerate only languages which testify, however frivolously, to a power of dislocation: parody, amphibology, surreptitious quotation’⁴³⁹.

Syxy’s love of the counterfeit as performative prototype also works within this logic; and the most resonant word in Barthes’ fragment strikes me as, once again, ‘dislocation’ – it is the forceful push out of the I / here / now into the somebody else / somewhere else / some other time which appears central in the work. The shadow, in this picture, is but the trace of this process of dislocation – a process of dislocation driven, as is the case for many dislocations, by desires; desires which – in Syxy’s case – inhabit the spectres of banal neo-capitalism, of a kind of plural wealth which, in Italy, was just beginning to make physical, inhabitable, sense. The cases of *Ragazze* and *Ragazze 81* execute a strange double-operation for the theatre: they counterfeit the event of fashion and of television at the theatre in order to stage the transfiguration of the real upon which the worlds of fashion and television depend; with the bathwater of this staging, comes also the baby, and these stagings end up falling themselves into the dimension of the counterfeit. Like this the American dream (the

⁴³⁹ Barthes, Roland quoted in Hebdige, Dick. *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 147.

‘American tragedy’ of *Gas Station, with Soft Breeze*⁴⁴⁰) is realised by placing spectators in a gas station in Italy; two sixteen year old girls *become* models for the filming of the adverts in *Ragazze 81*; the nightclub *becomes* New Zealand, for all we know about New Zealand. These are late capitalist desires – they are a consumer’s fantasies. Whether they are Syxty’s personal fantasies or not is not really the matter – what seems important and telling to me is that they were certainly fantasies which were circulating in the early 1980s. Perhaps what was also circulating, in the Italian consciousness of the post-years of lead, is that those fantasies were to provide the backbone to Italy in the year 2000, sweeping away what used to be known or believed about desire, about images, and hence also about the theatre.

Let us move the fake out of its life in the work of art, and see the concept agitate other spheres. In his book *All Consuming Images*, Stuart Ewen describes the case of the American company Faux Systems, manufacturers of the ‘Cellular Phoney’, an ‘imitation car phone that looks like the real thing’ and their motto: ‘it’s not what you own it’s what people think you own’⁴⁴¹. The mere symbolic resonance of the object – what Landi calls the ‘empty mechanisms of a game’ – provides most of the power fuelling the game itself, and this is a well-known fact in marketing studies. Yet the dimension of the fake holds a darker core, because it doesn’t work solely on ‘what people think’ – rather, and more importantly in my view, it works on what *you* think. This is where the fake is also a cathartic, and indeed liberating entity: it allows for an entry point, a fake entry point, but one which is nonetheless convincing. The fake TV studio, the fake advert, do, in spite of their fakeness, allow Syxty

⁴⁴⁰ ‘The STAZIONE DI BENZINA becomes the unusual, Italian, novelistic, allusive place of a world and a tragedy that are so American.’ I quote again from Syxty’s presentation for *Eloise* entitled *Eloise, il Particolare*. Unpublished archival material.

⁴⁴¹ Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1988. p. 57

and the girls to ‘play TV’ and ‘play advert’: it is a childish game, and like all childish games it has to be believed and hence *can be*⁴⁴². As such, the fake acts as means of exorcism of a desire, certainly, but also as (fake) invitation to a party one wouldn’t otherwise be invited to. I am reminded here of an article by Ackbar Abbas about fake goods in Malaysia which he sees as a ‘liberation from the capitalist assignment of value’⁴⁴³. A fake liberation, because if the Western assignment of value to designer goods didn’t matter, there wouldn’t be a need to make or buy fakes at all; nonetheless, Abbas writes, the fake designer good serves the purpose of elevating oneself from the position of ‘desiring onlooker’⁴⁴⁴: it plays only half the trick, not for others but for oneself. Thinking of Abbas’ words alongside *Ragazze* in which the girls perform for themselves, it strikes me that the mechanism of a fake doesn’t need an audience to ‘surprise’: the audience can be a part of its mechanisms, too. The Vuitton-clad Malay (or indeed the Vuitton-clad South-Londoner) merely performs to other Vuitton-clad Malays (or South-Londoners). On a bus in South London, everybody knows the handbags are fake, but precisely because everybody’s let in on the same narrative pact, it doesn’t matter. And *anyway*, even if it did matter, nobody’s looking.

⁴⁴² By which I mean that any kind of child’s play involving make-believe or pretend has to be believed in order to be any fun, and this, in a sense, is already proof that it *can be* believed (or there would be no point in playing: children might half-play but they don’t play *cynically* – if they played cynically, why would they play?). In my initial encounters with Syxty’s work, I often thought of this idea of childish make-believe: there is something ‘unproblematic’ about Syxty’s work, an apparent lack of concern regarding how many levels of reality have to be overcome or forgotten about in order to make the trick work. Although I am not particularly well-versed in marketing studies and advertising, the trick advertising plays strikes me as very similar: advertising unproblematically dismisses the obstacles that stop you from having the thing it sells; in a sense, the very fact of its unproblematic staging already undoes those obstacles. An engagement with a thirty-second advert seems to me to produce an effect whereby it isn’t really that for thirty seconds you forget about the obstacles, it’s more that for thirty seconds those obstacles don’t exist. Then you turn off the TV and it’s ‘strange’ that obstacles exist. And because you can’t stand it, you hang on to the just-a-little-bitness of experience.

⁴⁴³ Abbas, Ackbar. ‘Faking Globalization’ in Huyssen, Andreas. *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*. Durham: Duke, 2008. pp. 248-249

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 249

As is evident and acknowledged, then, the layer underpinning the many surfaces of the fake is that falsification easily turns into *replication*: not a *copy* but the *same again*. The idea of the replica has fascinated many thinkers in the history of art, including of course Benjamin, whose idea of aura is intrinsically in conversation with the idea of the fake – an idea which is embedded in this project via Perniola for whom, as we have seen, the idea of the shadow is an evolution of the idea of the aura. The vital turn here though, I suggest again, is that the shadow grows where the aura shrinks: the shadow is, in effect, independent from its ‘original’ object and dependent only on the desires accumulated around it.

•

Gianfranco Capitta, who attended *Ragazze*, wrote about the piece like this:

Girls are his latest passion. (...) He puts them under a spotlight and he takes photos of them, he makes them move a little, he even makes them talk. When Giusy, Rosy, Moon speak is when they truly expose themselves: without any kind of moralism or false modesty they reveal the world for what it is, beyond the cellophane it's wrapped in. And in doing so, they reify so many of the ghosts we uselessly try to exorcise.⁴⁴⁵

This sort of social commentary is common in those who are interested in jumping to Syxty's defence: it gives an acceptable flavour to the operations staged by the work, extracts its moralising tone, repackages it as a social, perhaps even a generational, concern. Articles like the one above seem to me to ‘fill’ the *emptiness* of the game with something we can hold onto (and perhaps they are right) and to justify the presence of the girl: because in effect, to

⁴⁴⁵ Capitta, Gianfranco. ‘La Vera Storia del Fidanzato di Barbie’. In *La voce di Como*, May 1980 (?).

say it with a Blondie song, *nothing is real but the girl*. Within the mechanisms of Syxty's fakes, the presence may use of the 'girl', in her appearance as what I have previously referred to as 't(r)opical female' that is Eloise as allegory and breeze, or in her appearance in the form of the young Lozej or the young Gozzano, or indeed of any 'fan' from the fan club, imbued with sense of adventure and coated with naiveté, could be expanded on much further. In order to do her credit, I would have to do a kind of sociological and pop-cultural work which deserves more research into areas other than theatre or indeed television: a fascinating tour, one which to my knowledge hasn't been undertaken, would be one that looks at the teenage press in Italy in its evolution over the past thirty years (because the 'birth of the teenager' as a consumer category happens in Italy around the early 1980s). It would be even more interesting to analyse how children appear in adult (and indeed nocturnal) popular culture in the Italian 1980s, what work their presence is invoked to do: there's a series of instances in which the child is used to sell a product to adults, mostly clothes and records, in Italy at this time. There's a whole sub-genre of Italian disco-music entirely about children, by children, and to an extent for children (not teenagers: children) – which was nevertheless consumed by adults. Nikka Costa, mentioned earlier in a review by Carlo Infante, is an example of this. These operations execute what is now an extremely alien fetishisation of the child, which at the time, it seems, was quite current. I am increasingly drawn to these cases but they extend beyond the confines of this thesis – for now, I want to make a mere hypothesis.

Problems seem to always arise in two shapes: in dichotomies and binary structures on the one hand and in contemporaneousness, in an historical co-occurrence on the other, which makes it difficult to understand where and how lines can be drawn between different

phenomena. As in the case of colour TV, which arose at the same time as private channels, the presence of this girl-child appears in Syxty and elsewhere at the same time as the televisual any-woman-as-whore, for want of a better expression⁴⁴⁶. This complicates matters: is this young girl related to this woman? Probably, yes. But she is here for other reasons too: something to do with *imminence*. As I stated earlier in my discussion of *Ragazze 81*, this girl points to her imminent sexualisation, an imminence both socio-cultural (in the context of Italy) and personal (for she is an early adolescent). But she is not on Syxty's stage for her body – if she were, the fan club wouldn't hold. She seems to be there for her thoughts, her aspirations, her *mentality*, all of which are of course tied up with her sexualisation 'in progress' but which are nonetheless irreducible to her sexualisation. There is more that is imminent in the young girl, a more which is very interesting: she is at the crossroads of capitalist desires, at the nexus of marketing and love, both an active audience and a passive incubator. In a sense, she is the shape of things to come, and manages to be the shape of things to come by virtue of *not* having been *yet*, of existing in the space of the not yet and the about to.

Let us return to the Mickey Mouse T-shirt scene, at the end of which Syxty hangs himself: here Gozzano and Lozej seem to embody some sort of dark future, some sort of pre-apocalyptic preoccupation. The focus, tireless, on dressing up and down, being made up and

⁴⁴⁶ Amongst the many failed histories here is the failed history of Italian feminism. I have to stop myself because it would deserve another study unto itself, but at the cusp of the 1980s so much of the work of the feminist movement in the 1970s was undone precisely by the figure of this 'any woman' which was so forcefully proposed: any woman can be beautiful, any woman can be rich, and any woman can also be a whore (I'm thinking, for example, of a number of quiz shows where housewives, via one narrative excuse or another, took their clothes off – and the pleasure in watching it was, I suppose, their 'any-womanness' – but this is only one example of the 'trend'). These events occur in the private not-even-corporate-yet world, at the same time as Syxty's performances above, and at the same time as the revocation of the so-called 'law of honour' which allowed a man to kill his wife if she had been adulterous (1981). It's a strange moment, the effects of which are very visible now.

down, also strikes me as working within this logic: it is as if the girl were constantly underlined in her malleability, in her being almost bionic, robotic, outside of space and time (that is, capable of successfully inhabiting any space or time). The letters, the sentences they are asked to read out, the questions about colours and drinks and photos of boys: again the girl is underlined in her ability to adhere, ‘joyfully’, to the fantasies sold to her, outside of cynicism, outside of calculation, untrained to seeing its undersides yet absolutely within those undersides (‘looking sad and afraid’). These girls, the girls on Syxty’s stage, are constantly in the process of *building themselves*: they are a construction site of identities. They may ‘truly expose themselves’, as Capitta thinks (or likes to think?), but they could also be all the time producing themselves as fakes – while they appear to be exploited, and perhaps *are* being exploited, they may also and crucially be part of a mechanism of fakery which incapsulates them and extends beyond them, and within which they may be playing a role as *producers*. As such, in this game of fake-real seductions in which the temptation is to *fall for the fake* (the sex-appeal of the inorganic), this young girl strikes me as playing also a political role (or perhaps a post-political role, or a political role in the nonetheless): because she is in a state of constant manipulation by the structures governing the image – at the centre of the performance as the perfect, ‘soft’ prey of late-capitalist desires – she might also be the one able to interfere with those structures.

In Tiqqun’s *Premiers Matériels pour une Théorie de la Jeune Fille* the figure of the ‘young girl’ is sewn into an ominous scenario – and its theory – created by the young girl herself, in which a logic of fake seduction regulates all relationships between human beings, be they relationships of love, trade, power (in the scenario, these categories coincide). Against

this backdrop, it predicts a ‘physical phenomenon, something like a loss of aura’ given by the fact that ‘the generalization of simulation is what makes simulation itself more and more manifestly impossible. [After this realisation] the streets will be filled with (...) corpses of desire we no longer know what to do with’⁴⁴⁷. Therefore, Tiquun write, the young girl will have to play her last trick,

but this one *really* is the last: and it’s to renounce all tricks (...) having learned how to support itself on essences, fully autonomous from any real object, desire has become, unbeknown to desire itself, *absolute*: an absolute desire and a desire for the absolute which nothing terrestrial can ever satisfy. This central dissatisfaction is the main lever of consumption, and hence it can also be the main lever of its subversion.⁴⁴⁸

Landi concludes his aforementioned ‘Cover Boy’ article like this: ‘unless he wants to perform a merely cynical operation, the letters from the girls from *Lancio Story* extend simulation to the sphere of affectivity and to social relations. And here is the limit, the critical point: you either go back, or you jump’⁴⁴⁹. This, indeed, is the question – or is it a *fake* question? Once arrived at the limit, are you not bound to play your last trick *but this time it really is the last*? I mean, can you really go back? Are we sure you don’t *have to* jump?

⁴⁴⁷ Tiquun. *Premiers Matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune Fille*. Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2001. p. 138

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. p.139

⁴⁴⁹ Landi, Paolo. ‘Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy’ in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 239

What Isn't, Is: paraphrasis of Kaputt Necropolis (1984)

It's 1984 at the Venice Biennale, and there's something in the air. Franco Quadri, who curated the theatre section, invited the New Spectacularity, thus operating a late baptism of sorts: his programme inserted some of the subterranean niches of what had been a relatively counter-cultural scene into the rooms – indeed, the pavilions – of experimental, yes, but nevertheless 'official' Italian and international culture. Some of the pieces that went to the Venice biennale that year attested to the fact that some of the vital lymph of the Neo-Spectacular had been running out, or that, less apocalyptically, the 'scena metropolitana' which had been photographed in all its vigour and sense of becoming in Bartolucci's *Paesaggio Metropolitano* festival had by now morphed into something else, was heading somewhere else – perhaps it was closer to its sunset, although we can't know that now.

La Gaia Scienza split just before receiving the Venice invitation and, much to Quadri's dismay, accepted only on the condition of presenting two pieces separately, Barberio-Corsetti's *Il Ladro D'Anime* ('The Soul Thief', 1984) and Solari and Vanzi's *Notturmi Diamanti* ('Nocturnal Diamonds' or 'Nocturnes of Lovers', 1984 – the title plays on 'diamanti' and 'di amanti' sounding identical). After having been invited to Quadri's office where the critic apparently tried to sew them back together, and after much dispute – about the name, which Barberio-Corsetti insisted on keeping although he was one member against two, and about the budget, which Quadri amazingly decided to double rather than halve – the group became two groups, and the two shows appeared, literally, side by side: the two spaces were separated only by plastic sheeting across which the three members, who had once

danced in unison their delicate political interventions, sonically abused each other by purposefully blasting sounds during rehearsals⁴⁵⁰. In watching the shows now, I feel I can see with precision the fault-line along which La Gaia Scienza cracked: *Il Ladro D'Anime* and *Notturni Diamanti* are, in a sense, similar – yet each one takes a certain aspect of the group's aesthetics and ethics and extends it into unexpected directions. The result is that those aesthetics and ethics, that whole enclosed in a shell, appears broken: while *Notturni Diamanti* is certainly more in line with what the group had done until then, it too *lacks* something – it looks somehow less 'real', less organic, much less convincingly 'inhabited'. La Gaia Scienza hadn't lost its touch, but it *had* lost its lightness, its quick-footed dreamy naiveté which has been its trademark.

At the 1984 Biennale, for which La Gaia Scienza's example serves merely as an example, it was beginning to become clear that the theatre these people wanted to make was changing, and *how* they wanted to make it was changing too. The groups were splitting, changing names, changing styles – for better or for worse, there was a sense that a season was almost over. The single most quoted reason behind some of these movements is the loss of a sense of 'group': the beginning of a delineation of roles, from collectives to companies⁴⁵¹. Alessandra Vanzi from La Gaia Scienza and Marion D'Amburgo from Magazzini have both, especially, highlighted this to me as a reason for their leaving. D'Amburgo liked that in Magazzini scripts would be written together, that movements would come from the writer and

⁴⁵⁰ Information recounted to me by Alessandra Vanzi during our time in Rome, April 2012.

⁴⁵¹ I add here that the reason I have been referring to the groups as 'groups' is that the preferred nomenclature was indeed *gruppi* and not *compagnie*. This idea of the 'gruppo' has a touch of old-school Left-wing camaraderie about it, a hint of the concept of the 'band' (we call bands 'groups' in Italian). It also, in my view, implicitly harks back to a generational idea of the groups in, say, literary movements, such as the Gruppe 47 or the Gruppo 63. Nobody calls theatre companies 'groups' in Italy anymore.

words would come from the performer, that set design would come from a photographer and that pieces would be written with fellow artists, crew, friends – she didn't want to let go of this communal dimension which in her view was the group's greatest strength. Likewise, Vanzi was especially proud that in La Gaia Scienza everybody, from the assistant stage manager to the performer would be paid the same because everybody was considered equal in the creative process, and categorically refused to work in the shape of a hierarchy. We could posit that the authorial egos developed by Tiezzi and Barberio-Corsetti respectively were what eventually altered these delicate balances, and what, first of all, drove the women in these companies away. But to be sure, there is a wider generational, anagraphic element to this shift, as well – the people in the groups are in their thirties now, some things are beginning to grow and change, and about a year later Magazzini will also split and change their name – they will lose the 'criminali', by name and by nature. Alongside the generational specifics there is also a generational question in the larger sense: both Vanzi and D'Amburgo see the delineation of roles also as a sign of the times, as the rise of a ruthless individualism that they politically rejected and reject. Other generational, historical coordinates can be identified – there is no doubt that the images are changing, Italy is changing, Europe, the world.

During the time I spent with Alessandra Vanzi in Rome in the April of 2012, as she explained to me her disappointment regarding the wage debate and other instances of division of roles and establishing of hierarchies, she told me a story from the Ivrea congress in 1987, held to celebrate the twenty years of the legendary Ivrea '67 congress, at which the practices of a 'new theatre' were established in terms of cultural administration. Ivrea '67 opened up funding to what in Italy we refer to as 'research theatre' and 'workshop theatre', uncoupling it

for the first time from the concept of the *stabile*, the theatre building. Vanzi explained how, apart from having always seen D'Amburgo as the intellectual and creative heart of Magazzini Criminali, she had seen her also as a true companion as she made a furious intervention regarding some of the ideas circulating at the '87 congress, accusing many of her former and current colleagues and friends of wanting to establish a power group of critics and directors with the intention of tying up funding to their own companies, to their own definitions of experimental theatre. She remembers being at one with D'Amburgo in the conviction that if the same had happened at Ivrea '67 her own work could have never been state-funded; that La Gaia Scienza could have never done what they were able to do; that Franco Quadri, whose theatre trips were paid for by his newspaper and who drove a sportscar, could never understand what funding for a theatre company meant, nor what motivated the making of theatre in the first place. Incidentally, she recounts how Quadri offered her a ride back in said sportscar, after they had spent the day, as she saw it, murdering Italian theatre. Needless to say, she refused⁴⁵².

•

⁴⁵² Again, this is information from a conversation between myself and Vanzi in 2012, and to which Franco Quadri, who died as I started this investigation, hasn't been able to contribute. I tell the story here because it strikes me as emblematic of the wider debates in Italian culture at this time, not only of the Italian New Spectacularity.

⁴⁵³ *Kaputt Necropolis* is a performance by Società Raffaello Sanzio, not yet Societas. I record here that the name was pre-Latinisation, but for ease I will use Societas in this text from now on, because it allows me to speak of the past and of the present of the company at the same time.

In this scenario of old loves, cut money, broken friendships, Quadri also invited Società Raffaello Sanzio⁴⁵³ to make their large-scale début at the 1984 Biennale. They brought *Kaputt Necropolis*, which Quadri later called ‘the worst of their productions’. He continued:

But once they got through all the various duels between Claudia Virus and Chiara Interferon, the races between Romeo Pilot and Paolo Worker (...) something significant happened. They invented a language, ‘La Generalissima’, which of all things had the ambition of proposing itself as ‘alphabet of all possible thoughts’, but which in its double nature, both parody of scholastic rituals and search for a personal, secret key for communication, contained a margin of truth which was in line with the company’s future work. It had to do with a will to engage in games that were more and more audacious and all the while believing in these games so sternly that they were able to impose a different kind of truth, the truth of the profound, which is what after all happens to every great artist...⁴⁵⁴

When Quadri wrote the text above, it seemed plausible that La Generalissima would never resurface formally in the company’s theatre again, although it was also, in my view, relatively clear that its grammar was still supplying some of the logic of their declared, exhibited theatrical language. Thirty years later, that is in this year 2014, La Generalissima has indeed made its reappearance, in a show entitled *Uso Umano di Esseri Umani* (‘Human Use of Human Beings’, 2014) a piece presented as part of an homage to Romeo Castellucci made by the city of Bologna, in a programme which alternates old and new work, large-scale and small-scale, screenings and a conference. The performance presented ‘in’ Generalissima

⁴⁵⁴ Quadri, Franco. ‘Questo Libro’ in Romeo Castellucci / Società Raffaello Sanzio. *Epitaph*. Milan: Ubulibri, 2003.

is not exactly a work ‘in’ but almost a work ‘about’ the language, in the sense that – similarly to the Generalissima scene in *Kaputt Necropolis* which we will see later – what it proposes is a translation. As such, alongside a manualistic, pedagogical tone, it also *is*, in effect, a pedagogical piece because it effectively ‘teaches’ the audience how the language works, how sense is made within it; it also teaches how to speak it, what its cadence and its pronunciation are. Up until the final level of the language, in fact – in which meaning is reduced to four words – its cadence is much that of Italian. At the final level, something changes, or rather something is subtracted: inflection is no longer audible. It is as if the words themselves carried also the work of inflection, like a tonal language without tone.

I shall return to these considerations. I stage them now, in part, in order to make visible my thinking which, in looking at this 1984 language and in hearing it in 2014, privileges a sort of ‘linguistic’ analysis. It is the mode of looking and hearing of somebody (myself) who knows the pleasures of studying languages, of deeply understanding their logical machinations – surrendering to thinking the way another language thinks – in order to grasp the dust of meaning that appears in between and beyond words spoken or written. It is also a mode of looking and hearing of a translator, by birth and by trade: I know that a language happens only partly in vocabulary, that a great deal of it happens in the ordering, in the connecting, in the assembling of vocabulary. I know the delicate, difficult work that prepositions do and the troubles of semantic – and hence sentimental – shifts and transpositions from one language to another, from one world-view to another. In light of this, although I thought it would be interesting to work on La Generalissima in the two pieces, what I propose to do here is to devote only part of my analysis to La Generalissima, for

various reasons: firstly, because I feel the current resurfacing of the language will yield more, and that it will be more interesting to do this work in a couple of years; secondly, because although there are numerous (and delicious) threads to be woven between the 1984 and the 2014 pieces, they are not the same show, and I would like to keep still the historical position of *Kaputt Necropolis*, for the economy of this study but also for the text itself; thirdly, because the script of *Kaputt Necropolis* – or what has been published as *Kaputt Necropolis: il Testo*, the document I am basing my analysis on here – yields so much that cannot be dismissed: Quadri is probably right about the ‘value’ of the piece, but Quadri was a critic and I am a researcher. Amongst my responsibilities I privilege this one, the dragging out of the darkness of *Kaputt Necropolis*, without focusing only on what has stayed or returned but concentrating – as always – on what for one reason or another has not returned, has been left behind.

The more I read this text, the more La Generalissima comes back into consciousness, the more I feel the material around it is important. After all, Societas Raffaello Sanzio say that La Generalissima is based on creoles, so it is based on languages developed from pidgins; pidgins are themselves ‘meeting in the middle’ translations, and their main preoccupation is what there is, and how to say what there is (or, as we will see later, how to say that what there isn’t, is). Creoles are the sons and daughters of linguistic bastards becoming linguistic rebels. As such, I think the *landscape* they arise in matters. But it isn’t only this: there’s something more important. Notwithstanding the importance of La Generalissima, *Kaputt Necropolis* – as a whole – is necessary, even essential, to look at and to understand the parable of the New Spectacularity, its arc, its becoming. Sanzio themselves are, in a sense, the sons and daughters of linguistic bastards becoming linguistic rebels – in their first large-scale outing they

immediately embodied the death-drive, the sunset, that had been agitating the other groups all along. We shouldn't forget that Sanzio are the only company in this investigation that didn't subsequently dissolve, abandon the line, change direction, name, ethos, theatre – Società Raffaello Sanzio are still making Neo-Spectacular theatre; their own Neo-Spectacular theatre, outside of space and time.

What follows is a paraphrasis of *Kaputt Necropolis* as it appears in Magazzini Criminali's magazine 'Magazzini 8' (1985); Magazzini published it alongside other scripts by *gli ultimi*, 'the latest': Teatro della Valdoca, the defunct aforementioned project Padiglione Italia, and Virgilio Sieni's first company, Parco Butterfly. I use the term 'paraphrasis' again to speak of a kind of analysis which seeks to write beside, to the side, alongside – but this time I use it slightly differently: this is not that different from what a child is asked to do with a poem at school, paying attention here to grammar, there to symbols, here to rhythm, here to concept. I push this 'scholastic' aspect of the paraphrasis here because this text *is* scholastic, pedagogical, demonstrative, a feature which is often prominent in Sanzio's work and never in Magazzini's. It is, of course, also a work of translation.

•

Kaputt Necropolis should, in my view, be catalogued as a work of science-fiction. It is different from other science-fictional Neo-Spectacular works (Syxty's *Famiglia Horror*, La Gaia Scienza's *Turchese*, of course Magazzini Criminali's *Crollo Nervoso*) because it belongs in an other aesthetics, an other set of references, an other view of the world. Apparently

completely unfazed and unseduced by the scintillating, fast world of mass media, by the system of fashion, by the diffused metropolis, it gathers its rosebuds elsewhere: in the non-urbanised countryside, which for others exists mostly as lost eden; in tinges of Communist rhetoric, scattered across the text, reminding us that, *actually*, in 1984 it's not all over yet; in modernist Italian poetry, in its most 'scholastic' reverberations; in slightly antiquated (and antiquising) lists, legends, stories, as well as in, as Quadri mentions, scholastic rituals, both parodic and extremely serious. It is similar to these other works – especially to *Crollo Nervoso* – because, like the best literary works of science-fiction, it undoes space and time in order to point to the present here and now. In *Kaputt Necropolis* a world that is utterly other is created, only to make it clear how that other world is very much our own.

As the title prefigures, *Kaputt Necropolis* is a broken city of the dead: like a thesis, the text proves, mechanism after mechanism, construct after construct, that the dead and the living can and should be thought together. Two sides of the sphere – the dimensions of life and of death – are pushed closer and closer together until they click into place as a round whole: we realise we are in the necropolis even now. We find that we're always already dead because we are always already immortal. While the powerfully other aesthetics of the group may, and do, move us to set this work apart from anything we have seen so far, I want to remind my reader now that its conceptual operation is not at all distant from any of the other pieces: it breathes an elsewhere into the here, it breathes the then into the now. It does the unreal. *Kaputt Necropolis* is a piece of metropolitan theatre – *Kaputt Necropolis* is a piece of *necropolitan* theatre. We could posit, perhaps, that by staging the necropolis Sanzio finally – and quickly – got to the heart of what the metropolitan was, or was going to be, always. Let

me pre-echo some words by Oliviero Ponte di Pino, words we will return to soon: ‘at the theatre, death is ever present. That’s why I love it. But I love it even more because it isn’t death, because it tells me something about death and, maybe, against death’⁴⁵⁵. In the story of the Neo-Spectacularity, *Kaputt Necropolis* is essential.

•

Kaputt Necropolis is divided into the following 12 sections:

(An introduction)

Show of the tired bodies and of the broken bones

Flight Attempt

Mucius Scaevola

Giovanni Pascoli

Robots

Generalissima language

Cowboys’ bivouac

Interferon

Scene of the cowboys who lay their heads on books

Cataclysm of the knowable

List of animal and vegetable extinctions

Scene on the demonstration of immortality

Accompanying the script in its edited published form are two texts which oscillate between the form of the manifesto, the declaration of poetics, and script notes by Claudia

⁴⁵⁵ Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. Review for Magazzini Criminali’s *Genet a Tangeri*. ‘Morte del teatro. Il cavallo ucciso rompe la fiction scenica’. *Il Manifesto*, 23rd July 1985.

Castellucci, one attributed to Claudia Sòmar ('The Shell Necklace') and one to Claudia Politikon ('World Hunger').

•

In the introduction, we find a series of ideas which have been haunting us all along this investigation: the first, quick sentences lined up in the first paragraph set up the definition of *Kaputt Necropolis* and its intervention as the photograph from a forgotten dead place which is also very much the 1984 contemporary.

Make me feel good.

The great ascension of men towards the future.

The great evaluation of the emptiness of ideas.

Kaputt Necropolis.

Let us dwell for a moment on the opening sentence: *fammi stare bene*, make me feel good. This sentence is like a lyric – a sort of hook, a way in, something seductive to make you keep listening. It's humorous, of course – opening an apocalyptic narrative with this epicurean tilting back of the head, with this ironic, half-smiling, end-of-the-world knowingness. It's also 'true', somehow. Coupled with the game played by that 'make me feel good', from the beginning a series of Anglicisms are used – the most notable being 'show' and 'relax' – and immediately they are in the wrong place. They are present as parody within a parody, yes, but their immediate insertion in a short, lapidary Italian makes this parody less funny, and less academic than it may initially seem: words that belong to the anglophone world of leisure and

pleasure nestle in amongst the ‘dark wood’ of steel and marble that is the language of the opening *Kaputt Necropolis*. This sets the tone: it’ll be like this, from now on. A linguistic situation is prepared, and arrows from other linguistic contexts are shot through it. The result is bizarrely baroque: like a baroque church, *Kaputt Necropolis* is too serious, so serious, so solemn, that its tiny darts of jokes, or its flashes of tenderness, or its moments of play are slightly disorientating – hard to recognize, first of all, and hard to react to later. To return to a concept we have seen before, here the Societas, powerfully, *overidentifies* – this, I suggest, will keep happening in their work. The thing with over-identification is that you have no idea where self-conscious staging ends and ‘honest’ belief begins. The two are presented as, and perhaps come close to actually being, completely coincident.

A half *dramatis personae* follows, of Paolo Virus and Romeo Pilota. Paolo Virus, we learn, has stopped thinking because he no longer needs to: he has a perfect and telepathic language which finally undoes *medieval doubts and religious ambiguities*. He merely ‘calculates’, and everything has become calculation. Romeo Pilota’s role is economical: his thesis is the disappearance of money, substituted by the spontaneous contagion of ideas.

Selling will be like talking. And buying will be like listening. We will become completely bone, but it’ll be an epoch of immense psychological wars. It’ll be hard work, living with money we’ve never used before, and it’ll be hard to be good. The whole world, every aspect of the world, will split terribly into eight. Our bodies will be smaller, our brain will invade our throat and our stomach, and births will no longer take place inside the body.

So this is the premise of *Kaputt Necropolis*, this is the scenography: tiny bodies made only of bones with reassembled organs inhabit a world split into eight parts, in which calculation is used instead of language and thought, and automatic transmission of ideas

replaces money. It is a perfect work of science-fiction, in the sense that in two paragraphs it has shaken the pillars of the world the way we know it and set up an otherworld, conceptually speaking: it has re-aligned language, thought, money (and via these three ‘pillars’ also the relationships between human beings). It has described the inhabitants of the world (and done it in the first person plural, involving us all). Finally, and crucially, it has relocated pregnancy outside of the body because, the text explains, the stomach is saturated with brain. It has set into disarray a certain moral compass: being ‘good’, we learn, will be hard work. One fact is left vague and spectacular: ‘it’ll be an epoch of immense psychological wars’. In the logic of grammar, this sentence is particularly special because it is introduced by the adversative ‘but’: we will become completely bone, *but* it’ll be an epoch of immense psychological wars. The bone and the psychological wars are interdependent: we are invited to ask ourselves questions regarding the relation between bones and thoughts.

•

Show dei corpi stanchi e delle ossa rotte /
Show of the tired bodies and of the broken bones

This section of the text, and the four sections that follow it, are the passages that lead to the Generalissima. I want to highlight this because there is a clear conceptual line which begins here and culminates there, a thread where knots are tied at particular junctures of relationships between the living and the dead, junctures that always see the living and the dead in proximity – the dead acting on the living, the living acting on the dead, or one or the

other crossing the line into the other ‘state’. Also constellating these five sections are pointers towards La Generalissima, arrows that point to the *necessity* of its existence: because the intimacy, the closeness created in the text between the fact of being alive and the fact of being dead unfailingly opens up onto a panorama of philosophical gorges where a problem becomes visible – that of that which is and that which is not running in the same stream, below.

This first part is punctuated by a repeated sentence that appears in brackets, the way that during mass a congregation would punctuate a liturgy. The sentence is: *winter break bones in spring*. With this repeated refrain, the text organises terrain around itself in order to talk about death: *I don’t understand why we should never think about all the years we will spend in our graves*. ‘I don’t understand’ is a classic, recurring incipit in *Kaputt Necropolis*, and it is powerful because it keeps dragging the reader/listener back to, indeed, the ‘bones’ of the philosophical argument that is being made. In addition to this ‘functional’ aspect (which gathers its important functionality also in its literality), it gathers a particular kind of stylistic strength in its almost child-like naiveté, allowing the text to pose ‘basic’ questions without a shadow of irony or of rhetoric. It’s a functional method for undoing the world as it is. *Kaputt Necropolis* is a world in which the fact of not understanding has a special weight also because many of these instances of not understanding are followed by a list of disarmingly obvious, incontrovertible facts. Here, the character states that he doesn’t want to talk of death, but of the dead – and ‘doesn’t understand’ why he shouldn’t:

they’re always there, always in the dark – let’s think about them – always horizontal. When we eat they’re there; when we have fun they’re there; when we’re in pain they’re there; even when we forget about them, they’re still there. Nobody moves them.

If this isn't proof enough that we *can* think of the dead (and in fact, that it's strange that we don't think about them all the time), we are reminded that our skeleton – and here we return to immense psychological wars – is also dead, that it is a heavy dead thing that won't change after death because it is already dead. And it is within us *already*. Another list of undeniable facts follows:

when we drink it's there. When we sleep it's there. When we beat each other it's there. When we die it's there. We're transporting something already dead inside us. We are already half-dead but very powerful though, because the skeleton helps us understand the whole-dead.

Another strange adversative: half-dead, but, though. Again childishly the original sentence ends on 'però', 'though', and I have had to render that childishness by putting in a double adversative in the English (à la 'but it's not fair though'). A first connection between states appears quite clearly: the skeleton, this dead thing, *should* take strength away by making us half-dead, but in fact it makes us powerful because it allows us to establish contact between what is and what is not, or between what is and what isn't anymore. This gathering of strength by subtraction rather than by addition is something which will return in Sanzio's production – and something which returns in the system of la Generalissima. It resonates – very *literally*, as has also become quite typical of the group – with the 'zero' which has appeared more metaphorically in the work of other companies. The text proceeds by way of syllogisms which, augmented by the child-like shape of the sentences, gives us the sense that while undoubtedly everything said makes sense, if we were to slip into non-sense we wouldn't even notice. There is a linguistic 'keeping still' required here that, perhaps, the

Italian language (with its crushing symbolic weight⁴⁵⁶) cannot perform fully; perhaps in Generalissima this wouldn't happen. Still, we are in Italian at the moment, and the set-up is such that if an illogical proposition was advanced in the same way as these, we would have to treat it as indisputable also – and in fact we will.

•

Tentativo di Volo / Flight Attempt

On the earth we walk, in the sea we swim, why in the air can we not fly? I started flying last month. I started losing weight. I got closer and closer to my skeleton. Without a lot of body. (...) At the beginning I lasted a second. Now I can stay mid-air for 7 seconds. Can you imagine a flying body? No. Can you imagine a flying bird? Yes. That's what I don't understand.

By way of the logic explained above, which by now we have become accustomed to, an instance of unadulterated theatrical, and narrative, make-believe is executed. The reasoning, again, is crystalline, foldless: yet, it poses the question of experimentation, and the question of the separation between what is and what is not. It confutes the separation between what is and what is not because it is a separation which appears illogical: as such, in the world of *Kaputt Necropolis*, it is a separation that doesn't exist. As the tale progresses, the character relaxes his tone – he talks of flying as if he were a sportsman being interviewed about some mildly

⁴⁵⁶ I refer to Claudia Castellucci's *Santa Sofia / Teatro Khmer Manifesto*, published the following year (1985): 'The only facts of reality (death, preferably) described or used here are purely functional, described in the wait and the hope that one day we'll be able to do without them; that one day, for example, we'll be able to do without the use of the Italian language (which I am employing presently), the traditional weight of which is so symbolically burdensome and compromising.'

dangerous practice, like diving off a rock (and indeed, this *is* diving off a rock – you either go back or you jump...).

Accidents? One out of eight. Nothing serious. I like it, it makes me feel good. (...) How do I feel? I feel absolutely nothing, I just know it's right for me. How do I do it? At the beginning I feel a bit shaky, then I jump. I'm totally relaxed. Yes, I don't fear the worst, not at all. Then I touch down and start again. Why do I do it? I learn a lot from my flights. Flying is no longer a word for me.

End of scene. Flattening of a philosophical distance: flying is no longer a word. It's an action. So something important, at the specular end of being able to name and co-exist with that which isn't it or isn't anymore, is being able to reify words that mean things that cannot be. This flattening between language, thought, and action is at the core of the logic of la Generalissima and at the core of the idea of the creole language, but it also strikes me, in theatrical terms, as operating an Aristotelian flattening which seems to chime in tune with various other, different yet similarly positioned, theatrical flattenings operated by the Neo-Spectacularity. In Sanzio's surface game, rather than constantly, headily tilting the angle, there are angles rendered altogether impossible.

•

Muzio Scevola / Mucius Scaevola
and
Giovanni Pascoli

Two characters are introduced, two historical, ‘real’, characters, who are also two classic Italian ‘scholastic’ characters, occupying well-architected rooms of the national curriculum. Perhaps they are also amongst the characters that most forcefully play on the imagination of the pupils of that national curriculum because they two stories of life and death, one of extreme courage and one of extreme pathos – the second story, significantly for the group, taking place in Cesena. The Roman legend of Mucius Scaevola who earns back his life by sacrificing his right hand by fire is caught by Sanzio in the moment in which he is about to place his hand on the flames – the moment before the extreme gesture is written into *Kaputt Necropolis* as if it were in slow motion, extended painfully over time:

Mucius, Mucius knows it is his hand that has to pay. Mucius looks at his hand. His hand that was faithful to him. Mucius looks at his hand, his hand that is sister to his other hand, now they are forever enemies. Mucius, Mucius looks at his hand, at his hand's white skin. It's beautiful. It's strong. It has nails like pearls. (...) The drawings of the fingerprints will be the first to melt like butter. The black hairs will be the first to disappear. Mucius and his hand think of their past. Mucius imagines his hand burning like a hog roast on the camp of a Roman war.

There is a lot of body in this passage, and evidently this makes it painful to read and, I imagine, to hear. But the most prominent aspect of all this ‘imagining’ that Mucius slowly performs, of his ruthless prediction of what parts of his hand will burn first, of his calculations regarding where he should start, of his pre-fabrication of images of horror, both descriptive (the hairs, the nails, the skin) and metaphorical (the hog roast, pearls), is that all the while, as Mucius imagines, we know – and Mucius knows – that it *will* happen. And this is not like dying: because Mucius will be present for the whole ‘show’. His hand will burn, and he will

‘be there’: he will watch himself murder a part of himself, establishing a perverse synchronicity between the world of here and the world of there.

The *Giovanni Pascoli* movement occupies a much larger portion of *Kaputt* as a whole and, although *La Generalissima* could be seen as the conceptual heart of the script, here is where I would locate its affective, and by this I also want to say *tonal* centre. First of all, the very presence of the poet Pascoli immediately hurls us into an aesthetic area we probably wouldn’t have expected, only partly foreshadowed by the tingling infantile note that has intermittently rung out in the background. Pascoli’s position in the canon of Italian poetry is a strange one, because although he is a modernist of sorts, both stylistically and temporally, he is an outsider to much of the aesthetics that moved Italian poetry between the 19th and 20th centuries. While he could be seen to pertain to a school of ‘small things’, that is of domestic, slightly decadent bourgeois interiors, of ceramic cups and white flowers, of quivering boyish sentiment, a sort of shy, rural poetry (and in this school he’d be in good company), there is a naïveté, in Pascoli, that is not entirely staged (or that doesn’t appear as such). Giovanni Pascoli, with his theories on the *fanciullino* (the ‘little boy’ at the centre of his *ars poetica*), is somehow closer to the bone, somehow less world-weary, less stylistically heavy than many of the poets that could be considered close to him. What is novel in Pascoli’s work is that while it maintains what we could call a romantic attraction towards the gaze of the child (a certain interest in innocence versus experience, in British Romantic terms), it executes that attraction in very modern terms, bordering on a starkness which nonetheless – or precisely *because* of this – is plaintively pathetic yes, yet modernly sharp, direct, cold.

Societas Raffaello Sanzio insert into their text two of Pascoli's most famous poems, two of those poems everyone has had to learn at primary school, entitled *La Cavalla Storna*, 'The Dappled Mare', and *X Agosto*, 'Tenth of August', and they are both excruciating. They are two of many of the poet's compositions which deal with a biographical tragedy: when Pascoli was still a child, his father had been assassinated for what might have been vaguely political reasons (Pascoli was from an extremely well-to-do family of landowners, and became a militant socialist as a grown man) as he was returning, by horse and cart, from the market in Cesena – on August 10th, which in Italy is the night of the shooting stars.

The first poem, *La Cavalla Storna*, addresses the horse who brought his dead father home, repeatedly invoking her with the line *oh little mare, little dappled mare / you brought back he who does not return*, a line which Sanzio use as this section's homily, repeated again and again, like the earlier bones, broken in Spring: *oh little mare, little dappled mare* becomes a tender and mournful refrain, a vocative of child-like awe and heartbreak. In his adult life Pascoli continuously returned to this moment which, apart from having been traumatic, was made more unbearable by the fact that his father's killer – of whose identity Pascoli and his family were certain – had not been sentenced. In the poem, Pascoli's mother speaks to the mare, thanking her for having loved her husband, for having run although she had terror in her heart, for having allowed him at least some safety in his final agony. And she begs the horse to tell her who it was: in the quiet stables, where the others horses are sleeping, she whispers a name into the mare's ear – the animal emits a howling neigh. What is interesting here, of course, is the fact that the horse feels, knows and can speak everything (something which will become a topos of Sanzio's work: the all-feeling horse), but also and perhaps especially the

fact that the living horse brings back ‘he who does not return’; that a living horse runs alone with its dead master on its back.

The second poem, equally painful, sees Pascoli’s autobiographical story mirrored in the animal realm – so while the mare appears as witness in the first instance, here the facts of the poet’s life happen at the same time as those in the life of a gull, who is shot as she brings food to her nest, and falls, on the night that the stars also fall from the sky. This poem in particular shares something with Sanzio’s language here, a language that is grave, minimal, yet decorated with tiny, tender brushstrokes. The verse Sanzio adopt most frequently is rhythmically, chromatically perfect, beginning with a gentle, soaring imperfect and followed by two remote pasts, two shots, which are very shocking; to quote what Cristina Ventrucchi once wrote about Sanzio’s *Hamlet*, they ‘reduce you to a sieve’⁴⁵⁷: *as a seagull flew back to her home / they killed her; she fell amongst thorns*. In this composition again the living touch the dead: there is a worm still squirming in her beak – a worm that was going to die eaten by her baby gulls, by ‘her nest, whose cheeps now are more and more faint’.

I go to a certain depth in describing these poems because two thirds of this section consist of cut-up verses from the two poems, divided strictly by full stops, and interrupted sporadically by exclamations such as *I see, I see, I see!* or *how my heart wept and wept and wept!* In ‘The Shell Necklace’, Claudia Sòmar simply writes about this section:

Romeo does Giovanni Pascoli, Paolo the father, Chiara the little mare, Claudia the assassin: Romagna, Poetry, Theatre, Profound Grammar.

⁴⁵⁷ Ventrucchi, Cristina. ‘Cicatrici di un’abituaria del Teatro’. In Romeo Castellucci / Societas Raffaello Sanzio. *Epitaph*. Milan: Ubulibri, 2003.

It's an interesting quartet. A very personal one, and one which I would argue is still very present in the company's work. It concerns a love for the vernacular, for a 'natural' sense of one's own language, natural like the smell of the countryside. Let us note that 'theatre' is nested amongst these words, too. There is something about the *profound grammar* present in Pascoli which is also present in the voice Claudia Castellucci will continue to use over thirty years, a language able to contain and make present the intricate, the tender, the ornate by expressing such things with the music of a simple, almost 'poor' monumentality.

Towards the end of the Pascoli movement, the text slips quickly into the abyss that is thinking of the future of the dead, of all the material present in our bodies which will disperse and make the things, pave the roads, be the dust of the world as it will be. *Our images* – the text concludes – *will still be there, in space*. The position of this heady future of the image in the economy of the text as a whole is odd, looking like a kind of rushed resolution to the lyricism of the Scaevol-Pascoli coupling, but it's the blossom of the final section of *Kaputt Necropolis*.

•

Robots

Truly a bridge, if this were a song, between Pascoli (the verse with the key change) and La Generalissima (chorus), *Robots* feels like it should come before an interval. The address changes: it's a 'you' that is spoken to, beginning with the sentence *give me something*

dedramatising. Give me something good. The narrating voice seems to be speaking to a certain breed of futurity which could probably best be connoted as the concept of industry: it has *legs like the blocks of a colossus*, it puts the body into a state of desperate contradiction, within itself, between will and need (*my body cried let me sleep let me eat let me fall; and other parts of my body answered you shan't sleep you shan't eat you shan't fall*), it pushes back all the other centuries, it runs towards the body of the performer, who wants to *follow you [it], imitate you, copy you, be you.*

The philosophical nexus of the piece is staged once more, but the industrial grey it is painted in this time throws it into a concretely political dimension which is new: the final passages speak of being in a *grave with strange workers. They no longer feel the known things. And the things they think are already there.* The potent temporal criss-cross that has been at work in the text all along now represents itself in the context of the advancement of industry, and this makes for a reification which is quite different from the stroboscopic effect of the earlier science-fictional references.

With the dead still echoing in our ears from the previous passage, whose materials are now strewn across the present world, this *Metropolis*-like image of workers entombed 'adds to reality', to return to that phrase of Pasolini's: it throws the metaphor a bone. The worker – I suppose he is a worker – concludes on a turn of perfect, cosmic unhappy consciousness. Perhaps he is at that empty edge of the city, the one we had seen in Mendini, the one we have been walking across in our metropolis. The empty edge of the city could be the administrative centre of *Kaputt Necropolis*:

*A hatred without passion enters within me.
An agonism without drama now dwells within me.
I'm going to rest a bit. Ciao.*

•

Lingua Generalissima / Generalissima Language

Before February 2014, before, that is, having seen *Uso Umano di Esseri Umani*, I had never heard la Generalissima spoken and I had never seen the 'wheel' upon which the structure of the language is graphed. This is a circle in which the four levels of the language are mapped: concentric circles divided into strips. At the fourth level there are 400 strips occupied by 400 words, then, further in, there are 80; these become 16 at the second level and finally synthesize to 4 at the first. The four words, the only words, strictly speaking, of Generalissima are the words of the first level: *agone, apotema, meteora, blok*. You have to *get to* these words, you have to reach them. In Generalissima, the ability of the speaker grows the fewer words the speaker is able to use, not the other way round. In *Kaputt Necropolis* this is stated quite clearly: *at the fourth level there are 400 words, unfortunately. But they're words for beginners. You've got to be patient.* 'Unfortunately', because they are 'weak' and 'equivocal'. Clarity depends here on being able to distill the world into its only four nuclei of meaning, and the rest is cover-up, noise, inability to distinguish, inability to understand, inability to split the world into its essential structures.

The hook into Generalissima is interesting here, because its origin is recounted as being temporal – again, this is about undoing the petty differences between the living and the dead. What is staged is a dialogue between Paolo ‘Virus’ and Romeo ‘Pilota’ (‘pilot’) in which Romeo laments his boundedness of thought to the measly time-span of his own life: *I want to think of things of hundreds of thousands of years. Why should I only think about my probable 80 years, since after my death I will much more certainly live for 100,000?* Here Virus attacks directly onto the verbal quality of this problem: *our words humiliate us, they offend our capacity*. Here, the teaching (again the teaching – I wonder if la Generalissima can be framed outside of this pedagogical, demonstrative motion) begins.

This teaching, here, happens by translation: the pupil (Romeo) asks how he can say something and the teacher (Paolo) gives him his words. The things Romeo wants to learn how to say are things that aren’t done justice in Italian: ‘big’ things which lose their colour almost completely in the ‘small’ vocabulary of the everyday. They are also the things that have been spoken of, time and again, over the course of the text so far – all those things that hinge on that syllogistic, fable-like, ‘I don’t understand’. Virus begins by showing every level of translation and progressively skips levels as Pilota feeds him more, and shorter, words to translate. I imagine Romeo Pilota’s voice enlivened, more and more thrilled – the exclamation

marks abound⁴⁵⁸. Having heard the language spoken, and having reasoned about it, I imagine Paolo's tone, on the contrary, still and passionless. I don't think la Generalissima, as I stated earlier, needs tone for it is almost 'tonal' in itself. The text is short enough for me to report the full list of the sentences translated in *Kaputt Necropolis*:

I am tired of the small. I am tired of moving through will. I want to put electrodes in my muscles. I want to speak like you. Without passion. I feel so good when I can't feel myself! I am split in two. I have understood what the dead do. They remain still without names. But they are colossal. Huge. Serene. Happy. Dominators of art. I feel extraordinary. Able to feel the unknown. The movement of the future. Beautiful. First. Original. Independent from myself. There is fire up here that doesn't burn. I feel up. Not down. I feel everything inside. How strange! I transmit here. Monotony that doesn't tire. Paolo Virus I see you everywhere. Teach me the perfect language. Generalissima. Down with those who read! Long live those who write!

Apart from and beyond the temporal X-shape that has been agitating the text as a whole and within which La Generalissima also takes its place, it strikes me that the content translated in *Kaputt Necropolis* pertains often to the spatial: here, there, outwards, inwards, up, down. As if these were good examples, as if this were due to the fact that La Generalissima splits the world into motions. *Agone*: a will to, desire to, push into or out

⁴⁵⁸ In a draft of this thesis, P.A. Skantze wrote in the margin 'yes, because you know his voice'. I want to expand for a moment on what this means for reading this script, *Kaputt Necropolis*, through the lens of an affective historiography. Knowing, loving, and treating Societas Raffaello Sanzio's work as an integral part of *my* epoch sheds a different light backwards on the company's past work, a light which has a different heat. That heat is the heat of the intimacy of having shared synchronic time with Sanzio, although it was another time and not the time of *Kaputt Necropolis*. In the other paraphrasis of this thesis, that of *Crollo Nervoso*, that synchronicity is given by the bodily encounter with an object from the archive, the record, which I described as an entity also 'hot' because it 'almost unproblematically' puts the body in connection with the archive. The mode of inquiry of the *paraphrasis*, then, reveals itself as suited to objects which share with the spectator some sort of *indirect* sharing of synchronic time (not the time of spectating, but a 'surrogate' spectating of sorts). The experience of having spectated Societas Raffaello Sanzio's theatre in a present I can call my own I shall return to in the closing pages of this thesis, where I hope to also make apparent how that synchronic spectating was, in fact, one of the founding blocks of this work.

towards something; *blok*: full, still thing, thing in itself, un-moveable total thing; *meteora*: external thing that enters; *apotema*: something like a view, a sight – perhaps a central thing with something that descends from it, a hill perhaps, a panorama. La Generalissima looks to me like a series of arrows. After all, can the world not be split into four motions? This is one hypothesis, one of many possible, and one which, I repeat, will be more interesting in a couple of years (or in 100,000). The Generalissima, in any case, is the language of the dead, because it is a language that, so to speak, sees everything at the same time, like Dante when he reaches Paradise: everything that has ever been and everything that will be and everything that is, in general and in detail and in different places and eras, anything and everything ever, all at once. This is why it's so important, now, to understand that it comes from *Kaputt Necropolis*, from the broken city of the dead. I'm going to rest a bit. Ciao.

•

Bivacco dei cow boys / Cowboys' bivouac

Interferon / Interferon

Scena dei cow boys che appoggiano la testa sui libri /

Scene of the cowboys who lay their heads on books

Cowboys. We will see cowboys in Sanzio again. They belong to a very personal mythology, part Emilia Romagna, part American Gothic. Textually, I group these three sections together because the cowboy scenes are somehow specular, bookending (one in positive, one in negative) the core of this triptych, *Interferon*. X-rays occupy much of the discussion (there's a lot of X in *Kaputt*): *x-rays tan our bones*. The fascination is in seeing the

bones, only the bones, colourful, beautiful, the structure of all things, the structure that hasn't changed for hundreds of thousands of years – *we have within ourselves the example of the mechanisms of every era*. An insistence on the skeleton is reiterated here, but the attention is slipping, flipping even, from the deadness of the skeleton to its immortality. Two examples are given: the teeth and the penis. If you X-ray the penis all you get is a black box; sex doesn't matter, reproduction doesn't matter. At the same time every smile is a *taste of how we will be for thousands of years*, the only available glimpse, in life, of the skeleton within. The cowboy resolves: *é fantastico!*

Interwoven with this concept is the idea of the *interferon*, the cancer that attacks cancer, a death being done to death, the paradoxical and wonderful victory of something so deadly it is able to kill death and hence reinstate life: death doing life. The *interferon*, in a sense, can be seen as the confirmation of the illogical syllogisms that punctuate the text, as the proof that what is thought can come into being. It also, again, performs a spatio-temporal impossibility: undoing the undoable, reversing the irreversible. Why can I not fly, why can death not be reversed. And indeed, we are left thinking, why not? The second cowboy scene returns to the naive voice:

I think the position of the planet isn't very interesting.

I think the division in males and females isn't good – there's too much 2 in the world.

I think the physical strength of human beings isn't good enough.

I think death is too obvious, and that's what's disappointing. It could be shaper: the age of the person who has died could change, or someone who lived with brown hair could die blonde.

Coupled with these affirmations is something like a *contro canto*, embedded into the text itself, that trivialises these preoccupations by reaffirming the impossible. It keeps stating,

reiterating that, in any case, *houses rearrange themselves, stones move, onions climb up walls when we're not watching.*

•

Cataclisma dello scibile / Cataclysm of the knowable
Elenco delle estinzioni animali e vegetali /
List of animal and vegetable extinctions

The antepenultimate and penultimate movements are of an encyclopaedic nature. The first, *Cataclysm of the knowable*, contains André-Marie Ampère's classifications of all human knowledge (1834) followed by Auguste Comte's classification of all sciences, also dating from the early 1830s. The second section contains, as its title suggests, a list of extinctions, beginning with the flora, then fauna, then human populations – the contents are listed in classes (eg. psilophytopsida, plesiosaurs, tasmanian).

•

Scena sulla dimostrazione dell'immortalità /
Scene on the demonstration of immortality

Last scene, first sentence:

I am dead, and the second after I died I saw an encyclopedia.

Here that image that we find in Dante returns, Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*, in which the poet sees the ‘universal pattern’ of ‘substance and accidents and their relations fused in such a way that what I saw is but a gleam of light’: *I saw what was, what is and what will be, all at the same time*. The cosmic order in Sanzio’s design, though, is different from Dante’s: it establishes columns of ‘dead’ images over the heads of the living, a world spiked with rays of light that travel from each of our bodies into infinity. Anything we do, once it is done, does not go away but begins travelling upwards from our head ‘on our behalf’; the more time passes, the further up it travels. When we die, our column breaks (at the root, that is at our head) *like a carriage breaking off from a train*. But the rest of the train, our column, remains in space although rootless, suspended. *Kaputt Necropolis* ends like this: *those columns aren’t inhabited by marionettes imitating us. We’re still in those columns*.

The ‘image’ is both timeless (it could belong in Lucretius) and very much of its time (it could belong in cyberpunk) and after all, at this time, perhaps it is fair to say that Sanzio, in their early 20s, are standing exactly in between their own rural, classicist references and the strangely electric world of Italy in 1984. And Cesena is there, of course, with everything that it is and everything that it is not but that it nonetheless thinks: with its sleepy foggy dark silence and its closeness to the Adriatic riviera, Cesena can be *Kaputt Necropolis*, and *Kaputt Necropolis* can be Cesena, because, as is written in this final movement of the text, ‘what isn’t, is!’. And of course it is: the columns of *Kaputt Necropolis* are hovering above our heads. *Kaputt Necropolis* has been intensely diffused. *Kaputt Necropolis* is the last city of this journey, the last one in which what isn’t is, one last imaginary reification before what isn’t just isn’t, at least not for a while.

Another Panorama

‘The actors place some branches in the middle of a field, which will serve as backdrop for the show; the spectators sit or stand in a circle, on the grass. The colourful robes, the tin crowns and helmets, the wooden swords (the shows are always about kings, princes, knights) are modest, they look like leftover carnival stock from a humble village stall.

Nothing is spoken: everything is recited in a chant that is still, monochord, extremely slow, without modulation; there is a violin that serves as accompaniment – or rather, a violin that plays the same notes again and again, and always in the same tempo. It’s an endurance test for the spectators, but also for the actors – although they get to have a good drink every time they leave the stage. Whenever it looks like it’s over, the story gets complicated by some new problem and the whole thing starts again: duel after duel, all the characters are killed off, and the play – which begins in the light of the afternoon – ends in an atmosphere of drunkenness and catastrophe, under the stars. Passed on in notebooks, handwritten by the peasants themselves, these dramas stage stories which are two or three centuries old, but of course they are also rooted in older models. Their theme almost always regards the persecution of the innocent (...). They seem to touch the spectators much more for their moral content than for their fantastical tone.

(...)

It was a Sunday afternoon. As I left the field where the show had taken place, and walked through the picturesque little town where Giovanni Pascoli is buried, I found myself caught up in another piece of theatre. Looking up towards the top of a tall staircase that leads to the public gardens up on the hills, I saw that a blessing was being imparted. Up there, at the altar, priests were lined up in vermillion robes; all along the staircase, kneeling young girls in pastel colours with paper wings attached to their backs; and at the bottom, all around, the people, upon whom the blessing poured down via a rig of public announcement speakers. The extremism I had found in more southern areas, the lament of the peasant, this religious sentiment of the girl-angels... all of this gets muddled in my memory, and this is the idea that remains of our countryside. The whole show flows into a folk apathy, where religious turmoil and political unrest are wrapped together, indistinguishable.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁹ Piovene, Guido. *Viaggio in Italia*. Milan: Mondadori, 1957. p. 431

An Epilogue in the key of Swimming Pools, Horses, and Sunsets

As this investigation assembled itself into essays and pathways, as the materials of this work swarmed around words, images, figures and shapes (atmospheres, TV sets, breezes, blinds...), as I watched the intermittent movement of much of what I had described disappear and reappear on the page and on past stages with all of its stance-bound anxieties (inhabitation, survival, compassionate pessimism, interference...), a certain fall towards death, or an abyss, or an ultimate surface became apparent. But it wasn't until the very last turns, until reading and re-reading, until grasping a sense of the journey described by these figures in their flashing interactions, in their escaping and chasing at the same time, that this movement became clear. In a sense, that sunset theorised by Giuseppe Bartolucci was true – yes, I have the *feeling* of a sunset. But *how* was it true? And wasn't it always like this, anyway? And should we be glad, for for all it takes away this sunset *does* yield an old world kind of certainty? Or is that a 'Catho-Communist' thing to say? Or is it just that time *is* linear, after all?

Towards the beginning of my work on this thesis, in 2010, I was invited by performance artist Marcia Farquhar to give a lecture in her 'Open University', a skip parked outside the Toynbee Hall in East London. She told me I could speak about anything: the only rule was that I was to stand in the skip and speak about something that either should be in the skip with me or shouldn't. I wrote an intervention entitled 'In Praise of Surfaces'⁴⁶⁰. It was here that I was first given the chance to put into words my interest for surfaces as 'a place where things

⁴⁶⁰ The text was published in Keidan, L. and Wright, A., *The Live Art Almanac Volume 3*. London: Oberon Books, 2013. pp. 328-333

stop', the place between +1 and -1, not an in-between, but 'a zero' with all of its full, round, noble reverberations. In this text I spoke a lot about swimming pools: I thought about glass and transparencies, and about how Heurtebise, the angel in Cocteau's *Orphée*, is 'l'ange vitrier', the angel glazier – I thought about Cocteau's transposition from the surface of the water in the original myth to the surface of the window, and then to the surface of the mirror as threshold between the living and the dead⁴⁶¹. Rather than the river Styx, Cocteau's Orpheus traverses the mirror: the mirror is Cocteau's Styx, locus of extreme transparency and invisibility at the same time, (hard) surface between one world and another.

We have all, I think, attempted such a thing as Orpheus' gesture: pushed onto the mirror to see if it leads onto somewhere, and found ourselves face to face with our face, squashed between one super-face and another, in a ridiculous cheek-to-cheek siamese 'interface', wondering if it can turn it to inner-face – but no, it remains severely 'outer'. But the Styx flows, and – in a sense – the mirror is still: I wondered about transposing Orpheus to the swimming pool (after all, wouldn't Orpheus-as-rock-star have a pool?). I imagined the effect of jumping into the pool and entering another world, but especially I halted on the idea of jumping into the pool and finding it was empty, of crashing hard onto the surface of reality, of finding there *is* a place where the glistening layers of the water's surfaces, so traversable and liquid, stop. The floors of swimming pools are mostly painted turquoise. The water is supposed to appear blue rather than transparent (we demand transparency of blue, hence perhaps why La Gaia Scienza were so enamoured with it) and the bottom of the pool serves

⁴⁶¹ These reflections are indebted to conversations with Enrico Castronovo about his work on the mirror in Jean Cocteau, notably in the 2001 thesis *L'Angelo e lo Specchio: il Mito di Orfeo nel Cinema di Jean Cocteau* (University of Palermo, 2001). Castronovo later elaborated on such themes in the volume *Jean Cocteau, le Seuil et l'Intervalle. Hantise de la Mort et Assimilation du Fantastique*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008.

that illusion, gives that shimmery blueness to the whole. What we are supposed to believe, in the everyday inhabitable theatre of swimming pools, is that the pool has no end, although it has no equivalent in the natural world. It is a perfect sanitised artifice with the illusory properties of eternal bottomlessness. It is a *trompe-l'oeil*⁴⁶². Its blue convexities beckon us with the promise of infinity (even more so in so-called 'infinity pools'), with the promise of never-ending baptismal depths which are also surfaces: places where innocence and experience collide. Ecstasies of freshness and purity. Places where the living meet the dead, where the water meets the sky: and us, floating, in between. A bigger splash, indeed: a *much* bigger splash!

As I arrive here by returning to reflections from the infancy of this work, I understand that this last figure I advance, the figure of the swimming pool, is one I have already hinted to in the movements leading to the sunset of this thesis. From positing the side-effect to the glossy untraversable surface I moved to the glistening television set, whose screen we may also be moved to push against (and maybe, as children, we did), feeling nothing but the sizzle of static on our cheeks – Umberto Eco's 'lost transparency' of the TV-set⁴⁶³. From the television set, where Eloise-the-breeze was stuck, I moved to Syxty's extreme fakes in his

⁴⁶² I want to call into play here a text by Omar Calabrese about the *trompe-l'oeil* which has helped me form these reflections and which appears pertinent in light of what I have been terming 'inhabitability': 'over time, then, the *trompe-l'oeil* has attempted to evade the limits of the painting. In its evolution, it has mastered techniques which have enabled it to posit itself as land between painted space and the observer. It has progressively intensified its attempts to make the threshold appear confused, to the point of traversing it, and as such has made the spectator more and more involved – the trick becomes so shameless it challenges the observer in the observer's very own space. (...) The *trompe-l'oeil* appears in a moment in which figurative painting is realising (...) that the imitation of nature is inversely proportional to the artificiality of the conventions of painting itself. This moment in the study of perspective fuses "historical discourse" with true "discourse", marked by adverbs of place, like "here" and of time, like "now"'. Calabrese, O. 'Il *trompe-l'oeil*: è corretto parlare di "inganno degli occhi"?' In *Carte Semiotiche* 12 / May 2011. pp. 12-30. pp. 27-28

⁴⁶³ I refer again to the piece 'TV: La Trasparenza Perduta' in Eco, Umberto. *Sette Anni di Desiderio: Cronache 1977-1983*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985.

‘girl pieces’ – I ended up in the Necropolis⁴⁶⁴. As I entered the broken city of the dead, Paolo Landi’s ultimatum rang out: ‘you either go back or you jump’⁴⁶⁵. I asked: but can you really go back? Don’t you *have to* jump? Over these reflections, Tiqqun also echoed still, another ultimatum: the young girl can play her last trick, ‘but this one really is the last – and it’s to renounce all tricks. Having learned how to support itself on essences, fully autonomous from any real object, desire has become, unbeknown to desire itself, absolute: an absolute desire and a desire for the absolute which nothing terrestrial can ever satisfy’⁴⁶⁶. Then, in the Necropolis, we encountered a character for whom ‘flying is no longer a word’. By undoing his weight, by getting closer and closer to his own skeleton, the flyer does the impossible: he jumps, and stays in the air. He has a few accidents, of course; but not that many, after all. It’s worth it, anyway. *It makes him feel good. No, he doesn’t fear the worst, no.* He doesn’t understand why a bird can fly and a human being shouldn’t. So he tries. And how does he try? He just jumps. *At the beginning I feel a bit shaky, then I jump. I’m totally relaxed.* And I can’t help but hear in that ‘I’m totally relaxed’ that vein of late-capitalist sport rhetoric, shiny muscles and the blind, macho acceptance of risk covering up some sort of spectacular death-drive. I can’t help seeing that last trick of the young girl extended to young boys in other registers: cars on fire in the San Marino sunset, another instance of the theatre setting fire to itself, and my mother saying she thought Formula One was sick because the show was death.

⁴⁶⁴ I always said it would end in tears.

⁴⁶⁵ Landi, Paolo. ‘Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy’ in Bartolucci, Giuseppe et al. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 239

⁴⁶⁶ Tiqqun. *Premiers Matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune Fille*. Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2001. p. 138

I think that's what Magazzini Criminali did between 1984 and 1985, in their production of *Genet a Tangeri*. I think they jumped into the pool, but they found it was empty; so they crashed. As if somebody, after all those years, had pulled out the plug on the multi-layered promise of infinity of the image in all of its sparkling reflections and refractions, in its inhabitability of watery scintillating roundnesses, in its depths that look like only surfaces (that is its depths we don't need to be afraid of) and the inhabitable image revealed itself as reinforced concrete, painted blue. I think that's what Magazzini Criminali's *Genet a Tangeri* revealed itself, symbolically, to be: *they just jumped*, but the skeleton, 'that dead thing inside us', was betrayed by its own weight on the hard surface of the real concrete. A morbid last flash of the New Spectacularity might look like this: a body on the surface of the pool, mouth opening onto a smile, *the image of how we will be for thousands of years*⁴⁶⁷.

I have had in mind to write a conclusion about *Genet a Tangeri* for a long time, although for a long time I wasn't sure why. This is why: I have already explained it. So I will not write a conclusion about *Genet a Tangeri*. At Santarcangelo, in 1985, Magazzini Criminali arranged for one of the showings of the performance to be held in the Rimini abattoir, which was a working building. They arranged with the abattoir's administration and with the local hygiene authorities to move the time of the slaughtering and subsequent butchering of a horse to the evening rather than the afternoon. The authorities said that as long as there was no contact between actors and horse, it could be done (the horse was destined for the human food market). Twenty-odd spectators watched the piece and, in parallel, also witnessed the killing of the horse. The scene is the scene in which Genet, old and frail, cries desperately as he

⁴⁶⁷ This quote, and those referring to flight in italics above, are from *Kaputt Necropolis*.

witnesses the Palestinian death camps of Shatila and Sabra⁴⁶⁸. The text in reference is Jean Genet's *Quatre Heures à Chatila*, written in 1982 after the writer had spent some time – indeed, four hours – walking through Chatila after the Israeli massacre. In Magazzini Criminali's rendition, Genet isn't walking, but flying⁴⁶⁹.

Scandal ensued. I have for two years picked at an archive of articles, press clippings and newspapers' comment and debate pages. Magazzini were not forgiven. A performance for twenty-odd people (some of which left, so even fewer by the end) became a public debate of astounding dimensions, the niche of experimental theatre pushing itself into the front pages of the national press. Magazzini lost public funding, chose to lose their second name 'Criminali', lost their position as tip of the diamond of the New Spectacularity. But also, in a sense, the New Spectacularity lost Magazzini; and maybe the New Spectacularity just lost. Lost a battle, that is. Not a battle against the moral majorities (for who am I to say and why would it be interesting for me to say so), but a battle against the image, against representation, perhaps a battle against the theatre, in which the theatre won – because the theatre always wins. That death was, of course, a dream of life beyond death: it was a death which became death while pressing against the hard contours of a *trompe-l'oeil*. When the eye realises it has been tricked, it hurts. As in some sort of painful child's play, I imagine Magazzini's double

⁴⁶⁸ It was in this occasion that Ponte di Pino wrote a sentence cited earlier: 'at the theatre, death is ever present. That's why I love it. But I love it even more because it isn't death, because it tells me something about death and, maybe, against death'. Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. Review for Magazzini Criminali's *Genet a Tangeri*. 'Morte del teatro. Il cavallo ucciso rompe la fiction scenica'. *Il Manifesto*, 23rd July 1985.

⁴⁶⁹ Genet, Jean. 'Four Hours in Chatila'. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1983), pp. 3-22. Berkley: University of California Press, published on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies. As I write in July 2014 with a radio in the background telling me how the Palestinian death count rises in the current Israel-Gaza conflict, I stop to add with sadness how current Genet's writings are.

disappointment: at finding themselves at the bottom of the empty pool and, at the same time, at having left themselves so open to being misunderstood. I see this gesture of Magazzini's as 'just jumping'. I think of it like this: they *just jumped*, and the pool was empty. Death undoes representation, unfortunately. If we jump into the mirror we end up blinded by shards of glass: we can no longer see. I imagine they had foreseen this.

So we remain relegated to standing on the edge between life and death: perhaps it's not true that you either go back or you jump, as Landi observed. It is also not true, as I myself wrote, that 'you have to jump'. Or maybe it is, but once a companion jumps, you see them crash and you don't. But you don't go back either. What you do is stay at the theatre, the theatre that wins because it keeps you stuck at the abyss, hesitating in poolside questions. At a first glance, it isn't ideal. It's so longing, so mournful and so uncertain. Yet, like at Mendini's edge of the city, the longer you stay there, the longer you realise it has its own pleasures: the strange pleasures of the constant almost, those shadow-dancing pleasures which strengthen the weak in the valley of the nonetheless. Like the thrill of walking over certain archeological sites, where glass separates the busy pavements of the living from the quiet cities of the dead: you tiptoe across, one level up, across the glass and over a theatre of gorges, canals and pathways. You think, if I banged my heel into this pavement, I would fall out of the metropolis and into the necropolis, out of this condition of hesitation and into the layered unknown of other cities and other worlds. A group of tourists with audio-guides rudely interrupts your thoughts, pushing you to the side of the surface. You walk away thinking yes well I suppose it isn't my time yet.

•

I recall an image from Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *P. #6* episode of the *Tragedia Endogonidia* which seems to perfectly symbolise this state: the back of a horse in an arched doorway. Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout published a photograph of this moment in their book about the company with the following caption: 'across the stage, within a doorway, the hindquarters of a horse, an actual horse, between the on and the off'⁴⁷⁰. An actual horse, within a doorway, between the on and the off. An actual horse, horseshoes tip-toeing between the metro and the necro.

In every horse I see on Sanzio's stage, I see the ghost of that horse who died not in, not for, but during *Genet a Tangeri*, as Genet undid his mortal weight and flew over the camps of Sabra and Chatila. She resounds for me as a remnant of an entire era of Italian theatre: and when I see her on the company's stage I salute her, as if to say 'you're still here'. Like Marion D'Amburgo to her inevitable computer, I want to say: 'buongiorno, Darling'. As you did with Giovanni Pascoli's father, you bring the dead home on your back, you grant some serenity in the hour of agony. You bring back those who do not return, *oh little dappled mare*. And when that horse has a cross etched on her flank, a swiss cross like an ambulance in a war zone, I think yes, you're carrying the dead inside you, you're the unwitting bearer of a disappointment: the extreme consequences of that disappointment of having tested the contours of the real, which is to say, you carry a suicide. You carry suicides on your back: attempts to fly, suicides with girls in Mickey Mouse T-shirts, nervous breakdowns, jumps

⁴⁷⁰ Castellucci, C., Castellucci, R., Guidi, C., Kelleher, J. and Ridout, N. *The Theatre of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge 2007 at p. 126

across buildings, the will to defeat gravity, unhappened events, that scene in *Tango Glaciale* in which a performer from Falso Movimento dives into a chromakey pool. So, darling little mare whose legs are on stage and whose head is off-stage, darling mare lying on stage stuffed and preserved, the heavy velvet caressing you as it moves across your body... darling mare whose hoofs stick out from underneath the theatre curtain, darling mare nuzzling around the stage after the burning of a piano, darling mare spray-painted red, you're not only a spectatorial memory, you're a *tradition*.

•

Again in their book on the Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Kelleher and Ridout mention Romeo Castellucci's sense of 'extremism' of the actor's 'beauty' as

having something to do with 'a lack of historical substance (that which, mysteriously, is given to be seen, is barely the tail of the animal, "...", as it hides itself)'. Maybe, after all, nothing of the actor, nothing of the animal is transformed. The actor turns and hides, already in flight, into the future, into the new, and it is us, the spectators, who find ourselves touched by the imprint that this flight makes upon us, the imprint of an image which we make for ourselves (...)⁴⁷¹

They continue: 'might it be any different had we been there? Perhaps the imprint left upon the spectators is as fleeting when the performance has touched us live, and in person?

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. p. 12

Here too the memory reaches out only to glimpse the tail of the fleeting animal moving out of sight. The spectator is already in the archive, examining the imprints'⁴⁷².

It is there, indeed, that I have been. Examining the dust left behind from the swoosh of the tail, the pulviscule in the theatre lights of that cloud of spray-paint the horse moves across, the shape of her hoofs stencilled into the remaining red puddle of paint on the floor. And I have asked myself questions about circulation: circulation of mists, of powders, of shadows. Like words which spread abroad things that are not words, images spread abroad things that are not images. And like words, and like fireflies, images are intermittent: they have a mode of circulation which is marked by a flashing, a coming on and coming off, by the rhythm of disappearances followed by re-appearances, unforeseeable but, if you look, traceable.

If you look, that is to say, if you move – we'll have to keep moving, is what Denis Roche wrote⁴⁷³. Keep moving if you want to photograph the fireflies. We'll have to keep moving, Didi-Huberman repeats in his book: 'if the image is a temporal operator of survivances (...) we will have to better understand its movement of falling towards us, that fall or that "decline", or even that declination, which is not disappearance, in spite of what Pasolini feared in 1975 or of what Agamben thinks today'⁴⁷⁴. But while in looking for some of the words of the New Spectacularity to extrapolate their sense I have had to press at a darkness, that is press at words in their moment of temporary disappearance, some of the images I have pressed at have not inhabited a moment of disappearance for the past thirty

⁴⁷² Ibid. p. 12

⁴⁷³ I refer back to a text quoted by Didi-Huberman: Roche, Denis. *La Disparition des lucioles: Réflexions sur l'acte photographique*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma / Ecrit sur l'image, 1982.

⁴⁷⁴ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010. p. 71

years: some of them have been there all along, adapting to other times, other places, other stances, other languages. Roach's question returns: 'what evidence do we have that they ever died out?'⁴⁷⁵. This question is not the same for words and for images; words, as I have asserted with the help of Starobinski and Williams, do go in and out of darknesses; images – temporal operators of survivances – travel differently. On what he calls the 'kinesthetic imagination', Roach writes:

...as a faculty of memory, the kinesthetic imagination exists interdependently but by no means coextensively with other phenomena of social memory: written records, spoken narratives, architectural monuments, built environments. (...) The kinesthetic imagination inhabits the realm of the virtual. Its truth is the truth of simulation, of fantasy, or of daydreams, but its effects on human action may have material consequences of the most tangible sort and of the widest scope. This faculty, which flourishes in that mental space where imagination and memory converge, is a way of thinking through movements – at once remembered and reinvented – the otherwise unthinkable, just as dance is often said to be a way of expressing the unspeakable.⁴⁷⁶

Even when terms for modes of feeling and the images that embody them disappear from language and become, temporarily, 'unspeakable', the images resist, or rather, survive: relocations occur, falls from language occur, but clandestine circulation continues undercover. As in a black market, what Roach terms the kinesthetic imagination has its own secret pathways for continuing to move through the nonetheless. And my work has been in illuminating those pathways, pushing at the places where I suspected circulation was

⁴⁷⁵ Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. p. xii

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 27

occurring even though it looked like it was not; pushing at the disappearances and wondering whether they might just hide intermittences instead. I have been following flashes in the nonethelesses of the memory of others.

As I recounted in the first panorama in this thesis, the first time I had ever heard of Magazzini Criminali was when I was a teenager, when the director of the theatre company I used to collaborate with, Gabriella Brigiano, mentioned them. I wrote that ‘it stuck’, and it did, which is why I am writing this now. It stuck, although it was merely a flash. A flash, I could say with Benjamin, ‘a moment’s exposure in those years in which the crystal of life’s happiness forms’⁴⁷⁷. But Benjamin, exquisite pedagogue, starts that sentence like this: ‘and therefore one thing can never be made good: having neglected to run away from home’⁴⁷⁸. And I did, though intermittently. What I didn’t write in my first panorama was *how* Gabriella mentioned Magazzini, which now strikes me as important: she mentioned them because she didn’t want the stage to be ‘stage-shaped’, she wanted it to be a catwalk but – I can’t remember why – even the catwalk left her dissatisfied. I proposed, for no reason other than thinking I should offer something, that we do the catwalk but in a diagonal. She said no, Magazzini Criminali have already done that. She added: although I thought of it first.

It really used to amuse me how there were many moments like this with Gabriella – a whole gallery of ideas that ‘she’d had first’. But as I kept thinking about the theatre ever since, I realise that there are many moments like this in the craft of making theatre in general. In his memoirs *I Giorni Felici*, Sandro Lombardi talks about how for *Sulla Strada* they had wanted the whole stage to be made out of real grass: he recounts this image as he gazes onto

⁴⁷⁷ Benjamin, W., *One Way Street and Other Writings*. London: Verso, 2006. p. 48

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

Central Park, where people (to Lombardi's surprise) behave as if they were on the beach although they are in the centre of the city. In the book he writes about having scrapped that idea after an encounter with Pina Bausch's *1980* in Cologne, whose stage had made him jump as he walked into the theatre after the interval, covered in grass. He continues:

...but that afternoon in Central Park, I wasn't even interested in analysing the coincidence or searching for a possible source for Bausch's image; rather, I was interested in realising, once more, how the gaze of an artist who begins from reality in order to recreate it can teach us how to see that very reality, putting into focus transitory aspects which become fixed, like this, into unforgettable icons. What I was having that afternoon was, in effect, an encounter with a fragment of reality thanks to Pina Bausch's gaze.⁴⁷⁹

The clandestine circulation of images at the theatre, the way in which the synesthetic imagination moves in its relocations and intermittences, makes for many moments such as the two related above; and rarely, after all, are they intercepted before they start becoming. Only by chance did Gabriella remember that 'Magazzini had done it first' (although I am still to understand where – I think, maybe, *Notti Senza Fine*); only by chance did Lombardi see Bausch's piece and realise they had been thinking about similar images, an image Bausch had relocated thus from transitory fragment of reality to unforgettable icon.

I too gasped, as I entered the theatre after the interval in seeing Pina Bausch's piece in 2014 – not because I had had the idea, but because I 'recognised', within *1980*, and especially in *that* scene, a thousand fragments of New Spectacularity: gestures, lighting choices, props, figures, images; I recognised a whole synesthetic imagination which I had been working with

⁴⁷⁹ Lombardi, Sandro. *I Giorni Felici: Realtà e Memoria nel Lavoro dell'Attore*. Milan: Garzanti, 2004. p. 154

for years. Even Bausch, whose pieces had always struck me as being out of time with their own time, was giving me something which pertained to its time, to the year 1980. I recognised in spectating *1980* the images and the affective stances I had been working with, the way I had recognised in spectating *Palermo Palermo* the images and the affective stances of my own city – and in a sense both were my own: the latter by birth, sewn into my body by culture; the former had by transmission, by study, by attention, also installed themselves within me. The time of *1980* was perhaps a time distant to most of the spectators sitting in Sadler's Wells that night in 2014, but close to me as I watched, as I sat in my seat, with my body and mind full of kinesthetic imagination out of time resonating with the time of the piece on stage, a time when I wasn't even born.

In attempting to describe the profound spectatorial resonances of that night to friends and colleagues I realised, with disappointment, that I entered the realm of the unspeakable at the same time as that of the unforgettable. Words failed me, *really*. I wasn't doing a very good job at explaining the temporal criss-cross I had experienced, the flavour of that simple past morphing in my mouth into a 'living' imperfect. The feeling that when I left Sadler's Wells I didn't really leave the theatre, I *was leaving the theatre* in that Nervalian way, a theatre similar to that which I was dwelling in anyway, a similar swimming pool, a discreet splash amongst the images I had been gathering and scrutinising in the hope of learning their secrets. In the heat of post-spectating, my questions to fellow audience members translated badly: did you not see out of the corner of your eye the tail of a horse?

In her *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*, P.A. Skantze writes:

The idea of humble gathering as a task for the spectator desirous of communicating memories of work heard and seen has its mimetic other in the practice of making. The invitation to admire the random opportunism of the makers of performances who tend to collect discarded bits, acoustic, textual, visual and introduce them into the production provides one of the great pleasures, aural and sensual, of lingering in the weathered thresholds of live performance. Think how the Western god of all plays Shakespeare incorporated work like the ‘upstart crow’ he was, any shiny bauble found its way into his play. And rather than hide the thievery, theatre as a medium of performance seems to rejoice in stealing in plain sight (...). So the medium of performance also offers almost instantaneous commentary on the changes happening in and to elements of its own form.⁴⁸⁰

Countless ‘upstart crows’ exist in the Neo-Spectacular archive: and differently from what I had noticed in Gabriella, and differently from Lombardi’s shock at walking into that theatre in Cologne, it is mostly what Skantze describes as ‘performance seeming to rejoice in stealing in plain sight’ which appears to be at work. Stealing so much it is no longer stealing, stealing so much that the act of stealing becomes akin to a collective making of some form of canon, of structure of feeling, and, in the swoosh of the tail of hindsight, of a tradition. The intermittent nature of the Neo-Spectacular archive doesn’t allow me to know with precision how Falso Movimento’s 1978 piece ‘Dallas 1983’ breathed into Magazzini Criminali’s *Crollo Nervoso*, or how *Crollo Nervoso* breathed into the script of an unhappened piece by Syxty from the same year carrying almost exactly the same words (video-phonecalls with emergencies and special messages for Mary) – if, that is, it did. Stealing in plain sight?

⁴⁸⁰ Skantze, P.A. *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*. New York: Punctum, 2013. p. 94

Maybe. Common structures of feeling? Also maybe. The ‘medium of performance offering almost instantaneous commentary on the changes happening in and to elements of its own form’⁴⁸¹? Almost certainly. If you keep moving – indeed if you stay itinerant and if you stay at the edge, at the ‘weathered threshold’ in Skantze’s own Benjamin-bound spectatorial constellation – you see patterns of fireflies emerge. Skantze proposes itinerancy as a paradigm for a practice of spectating in the present in the knowledge that itinerancy continues to yield as that present becomes past, ‘because memory also retrieves what has not been stored’⁴⁸². Here I have been suggesting that we stretch that itinerancy to the archive, keep moving in the space where we already are, ‘examining the imprints’⁴⁸³ in the infinitesimal movement of air still marking the passage of our darling little mare’s tail. I have attempted, here, to keep moving over space and over time in order to recover a memory, intercept a tradition and in order also, at the side, to gather some strength by undoing ruinous scripts, by illuminating certain mixtures of survival and resistance we might call survivances. I have attempted to keep moving in order also, that is, to reflect on the sweet and sour taste of sentences like this one: ‘in spite of what Pasolini feared in 1975’⁴⁸⁴.

•

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 4

⁴⁸³ Castellucci, C., Castellucci, R., Guidi, C., Kelleher, J. and Ridout, N. *The Theatre of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge 2007 at p. 12

⁴⁸⁴ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Come le Lucciole: una Politica della Sopravvivenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010. p. 71

The reason I became curious about the New Spectacularity, though it had its genesis in a ‘flash’, had to do with an opaqueness – and it is probable, of course and again after Benjamin, that the two things are related. I had asked myself questions about Magazzini and the like for a while, but these questions acquired body in my first experiences of spectating Sanzio’s work in France around 2005/2006, when I was living in France and the French theatre scene was having one of its many love affairs with the Societas. This gave way to a rhetoric not dissimilar to a kind of rhetoric I described in the movement of this thesis entitled *Dark in the Piazza*: a kind of urban cultured awe in the face of the provincial unknown, an exoticising gaze which makes the object of the gaze more and more delicious; a kind of fulfilment harboured in the encounter with, as Nicholas Ridout describes his first (also horse-bound) encounter with Sanzio, ‘something absolutely alien’⁴⁸⁵. But rather than Ridout’s curiosity, what I mostly witnessed as I spectated and conversed was a satisfaction with that alienness; a satisfaction, in a sense, self-fulfilling.

Sanzio, who in their encounter with the ‘theatre fauna’ (let’s use Tondelli’s word ‘fauna’ one last time) do nothing to appear not mysterious or not alien, were treated with an air of amazement – where do they get these images? Where the hell is Cesena? They’re ‘missed peasants’? They studied agricultural sciences? Like Josephine Baker almost a century earlier, Sanzio seemed to (very willingly, very knowingly, like Josephine Baker) shock and titillate the Parisian audiences, always hungry for the image of the ‘other’, of the ‘alien’. In those days, I read an extremely *vieux monde* book by Suzanne Joubert called *Cesena dans le*

⁴⁸⁵ Ridout, Nicholas. ‘Make-Believe: Societas Raffaello Sanzio do Theatre’ in Kelleher, J. and Ridout, N (eds). *Contemporary Theatre in Europe: A Critical Companion*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. pp. 175-187

Paysage, in which the author goes to Cesena to see ‘where the images of the *Tragedia* blossom and grow’ (‘so I’m here, in Italy. Kilometres from home. Here to see what it’s like elsewhere’⁴⁸⁶). Joubert’s book is full of poetic insight, Cesena photographed in all of its brown-blue misty splendour. Yet in holding on to its quasi-mythical ‘foreignness’ it paradoxically suffocates how interesting the place *actually* is. My thinking has always been that there is more pleasure to be gained in moving somewhere and getting used to its marvels than in marvelling as tourist or as traveller. This thesis, in many ways, has its genesis in some Parisian bistro (maybe on the left bank, just like Latimer and Jameson...) and in some post-theatre conversation in which I thought no, it isn’t possible that it comes from nowhere, I don’t believe you. I bet it comes from somewhere. I recognise *something* within it, something familiar... I wonder if it comes from *there*.

The initial attempts in the tracing of some sort of genealogy, though, provided me with other, new shades of opaque: firstly, a long historical hiatus – my impression, quickly confirmed, was that at one point there had been a loss of interest. Then, as I pushed at the corners of the subject, or of what at this point was the shadow of a subject, I realised that although nobody was interested *anymore* there had been interest *before*. My investigations into the New Spectacularity, once, so to speak, the tap was open, were marked by a landscape characterised by what was actually an extremely large amount of written records (books, articles, essays, press, reviews) and almost no archive of images at all. It is not that the written records gave themselves as particularly available – but over time, understanding names and landscapes, getting familiar with defunct publishing houses, learning that each newspaper

⁴⁸⁶ Joubert, Suzanne. *Cesena dans le Paysage*. Paris: Les Solitaires Intempestifs. p. 35

archive has its own internal logic, making friends with second hand book vendors, begging, borrowing, stealing, there were written traces everywhere.

The archive of images, moving or still, is however almost mute. Getting it to sing, even to sing a few notes, has been amongst my most joyful tasks as ‘detective’ and also undoubtedly the most exhausting: Neo-Spectacular work is very rarely publicly archived in libraries, universities, theatres or museums, and the little work that is is overwhelmingly consigned to obsolete and as such inaccessible supports⁴⁸⁷. The archive of the New Spectacularity is almost entirely private – in order to access recorded forms of the work, you are obliged to a human encounter, which means you’re partly obliged to a methodology which has at its heart some form of oral history. This, of course, is no bad thing: in order to find traces of the New Spectacularity you have to be in kitchens, living rooms, cupboards with people. Often, though not always, with the people who made the work. Sometimes friendships develop, long conversations, cinema outings, dinner parties; sometimes a middle ground is established, an envelope, a letter, a phone-call; sometimes you’re refused entry and encouraged to stop trying: I have been welcomed as a visitor whose interest is flattering, I have been received as a friend and I have been treated like a thief (but never, it has to be said, by anyone who *made* the work – only by some of those who captured it, and alas some of it lingers there, in captivity...).

⁴⁸⁷ Various documents I have had to do without, so far, are documents in U-Matic, film and other relatively sophisticated obsolete supports (the VHS doesn’t tend to pose problems) which librarians, often mortified, have been unable to let me look at: either for simple lack of equipment or because the attempt to view or transfer such materials could compromise the documents themselves (of whose state we know nothing – they could already be gone). I have had to understand that one researcher’s interest doesn’t justify the hassle, the risk nor the expense of such operations in public archives. Nevertheless, my fingers remain crossed.

Yet, the inaccessibility of the Neo-Spectacular visual archive is not the opaqueness I set out to describe: the most opaque aspect of the work comes from that abundant written archive itself. On a day of particularly poignant discomfort, in which the lack of archive appeared insurmountable, I found myself peeling potatoes and drinking a glass of wine with Valentina Valentini in her kitchen in Rome – she was amongst the friends I made, who invited me for dinner. An eager spectator and critic of the New Spectacularity at the time and a professor of theatre studies now, she has been amongst the most generous contributors to my archive for this investigation. Valentini keeps copies of shows digitalised and preserved; the material she has kept, she has kept, I want to say, ‘responsibly’ – what I mean is, she has kept it as a theatre historian. As I told her about some of my failed attempts to get at certain archives, she asked me how many shows I had seen; I replied with pessimistic numbers and pessimistic tone. Valentini, I think, scolded me; she said: ‘you have to see the shows, or you’ll end up doing criticism of the criticism!’. I retorted with a gloomy response about truth and archives. Valentini dropped a sentence in the air along the lines of ‘well of course, I’ve dedicated years to Eleonora Duse’s voice and obviously I’ve never heard it’; she moved onto preparing the salad.

The opacity of the Neo-Spectacular archive wasn’t (and isn’t) only in its inaccessibility, or in the gap between the mountains of the written and the crumbs of the filmed or photographed, but in the quality of those mountains of written work which have obliged me, to an extent, to do criticism of the criticism, but which have also and especially supplied me with an entry point, with something to push against, something to scratch at. This might seem paradoxical, since there is not (or not supposed to be) an opacity where we have pages and

pages of words. Yet what these pages and pages of words supplied me with was a growing sense of hesitation, which pushed me to read more but also pushed me to try and see more work and which also pushed me, crucially, to talk about the work with its makers, and to push at those words, to attempt to verify them, to try and grasp what they meant. What I found strange was that most of the words written on the New Spectacularity were the same words. They describe the same concepts in the same terms, they use the same adjectives and are constellated with the same euphoria. They stage similar disappointments and reproaches and sometimes even the different shows they describe seem to be the same show again and again.

This is why this thesis begins with Jean Starobinski's reminder of how words do a kind of *spreading abroad* of things which are not words. The opacity I perceived here lay not in this sense of repetition (for circulation interest me, and as such so does repetition) but in a question that had to do, as I iterated at various points in the introduction to this work, with desire: I understand that it was the same figures again and again, I understand how these things work. What I wanted to know was why it was desirable for these figures to return: why a desire to make this theatre (again and again), to keep seeing it (again and again), to keep writing about it (...). The passage I quoted above from Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* continues with what Roach calls 'vortices of behaviour', a concept not dissimilar to what I have been terming 'mode of feeling':

their function is to canalize *specific needs, desires and habits* in order to reproduce them (...) although such a zone or district seems to offer a place for transgression, for things that couldn't happen otherwise or elsewhere, in fact what it provides is much more official: a place in which everyday practices and attitudes may be legitimated, 'brought into the open', *reinforced, celebrated or intensified*. When this happens, what I will be

calling condensational events result. The principal characteristic of such events is that they gain a powerful enough hold on collective memory that *they will survive the transformation or the relocation of the spaces in which they first flourished*.⁴⁸⁸

It is these holds on collective memory, the intermittently visible survival of figures, which I have been concentrating on: it is upon these aspects of the event that the written archive, though vast, seemed to remain silent by continuing to repeat. It is here that I pushed at that archive because I came to this investigation as a spectator who didn't believe that 'something came from nothing' and had no intention of resting on the exotic foliage of such a belief. I have dedicated time to pushing at some of the most 'illuminated' passages in the archive because they were revealing themselves as also the darkest. But in the search for fireflies in the industrial lights of the riviera, in the car headlights that are 'the darkness' of postmodernity, these chiaroscuros are things I have become accustomed to. Amongst my intents as I began this investigation was a desire to shed some light into the present by charting influences between the landscape of the then and the panorama of the now – yet I haven't spoken once of 'influences'. I hope the reasons why I haven't are clear.

Microhistorian Robert Darnton wrote in his 1985 *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*: 'when we cannot get a joke, or a proverb, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are onto something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning. The thread might even lead

⁴⁸⁸ Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. p. 28. All emphases my own.

into a strange and wonderful world view'⁴⁸⁹. By 'picking at the document where it is most opaque' I have attempted to thread together some of the pieces in the past which may (or may not) have an effect on the present, on the spectatorial present and on the Italian present. The 'jokes, proverbs, rituals or poems' I 'didn't get' were not, as it turns out, influences, but rather have revealed themselves as, indeed, 'world views' and 'systems of meaning' which, although my work does not look back as far as the 18th Century like Darnton's, have in some cases been eclipsed from view. It is a time round the corner from which, nevertheless, certain world views *have* shifted enormously, together with objects, stances, words and expressions, habits, mores, borders, media...⁴⁹⁰ The 'jokes, proverbs, rituals or poems' I 'didn't get' have revealed themselves as affective stances, positionings and figures in the intermittently visible yet ever-circulating past continuous of leaving a theatre; which is full of unhappenings, of never-mores, of nonetheless and never agains, of course. But perhaps they survive under the radar.

•

⁴⁸⁹ Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books, 2009 (1985). p. 5

⁴⁹⁰ Something which I have often returned to over the past four years is an old 2007 copy of the magazine 'Il Diario', a periodical which lasted eight years as a weekly, a couple as a fortnightly, then became monthly and then disappeared. While we had it though, to steal Mendini's expression, 'we loved it madly'. In 2007, 30 years from '77, they published a 77 Special (which I have quoted from a couple of times here) entitled 'The way we were: if I had foreseen all of this'. Amongst articles, reportages, essays and reflections, they wrote a page entitled 'things that didn't exist', a list that includes an enormous variety of 'things': legal abortion, ready-made meals for one, anti-mafia laws, phone sex, 'light' cigarettes, fleece, AIDS, unleaded petrol, prenatal scans, the microwave, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia, Rai 3, Mediaset, Polish people at traffic lights, transexual prostitution, the day-after pill, carers, the mass-obsession with cholesterol, the everyday use of the words Shiite, Ayatollah, Jihad, organic food, Chinese capitalism and many, many, many more. It's interesting, going back to that page. It would be good to compile a page like that every ten years – even with just 'jokes, proverbs, rituals and poems' – just to see how much the everyday has changed, and hence also the stances we live by.

Opaque zones, silent archives, dark documents. I would like to return to Krypton's 1982 performance of *Corpo*, to that half hour of darkness I have on video, that half hour of darkness which made me think *if that's all there is then let's keep dancing*. And I also want to recall now Dick Hebdige's invitation to learn how to dance in the dark, so that I may stretch that sentence into the archive, into the work of illuminating the past, into the work of the detective, her practice of hunting for 'threads and traces'⁴⁹¹.

In these days, Krypton are re-doing their *Eneide* (1983). It is called *Eneide: un Nuovo Canto* ('Aeneid: a New Chant', 2014) and it is coming to a theatre near you this summer, if you happen to find yourself in Northern or Central Italy. Publicised as the 'revival of the "cult" show of the 1980s' it is not a reprise like Pina Bausch's aforementioned *1980*, or like Jan Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness* which shared a bill in Milan with, amongst others, Società Raffaello Sanzio's *Kaputt Necropolis*, but an augmented and updated version. The piece now has a text, which it never had before; the band is live, playing songs they had never played out of a studio before and adding others (this is also a revival of a truly cult band of the 1980s) and uses digital technologies instead of its original, extremely complex, analogue apparatus of projections and laser beams. I have seen a video of it, and I will go to see it soon. Will I feel that sense I felt as I left *1980*? Or the sense I feel in watching the reprise of Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness*? I have watched the latter only on tape, unfortunately, but I found it thrilling. The Krypton tape doesn't thrill me the same way. I don't

⁴⁹¹ As I quote this book of microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg's, let me also say that I have, over the past four years of this investigation, read and sometimes re-read all of the books of his mother, the novelist Natalia Ginzburg. Although Carlo Ginzburg often cites the influence of his father Leone Ginzburg on his work in historiography, I want to take it upon myself to also cite Natalia as a microhistoriographical influence – if not for him, then at least for me. For Natalia Ginzburg the position of a window, the contents of a fridge, the tone of a sentence reveals the synesthetic imagination of a culture, of a time, and of a place.

know why this is. I don't want to be a purist, and certainly not in the New Spectacularity, so impure by nature.

Rather than reanimating its images (which *have* been surviving outside of Krypton's theatre, though Krypton, who have themselves been all along working in similar modes, may not have seen their own images survive in other companies' work), this *Eneide* might just be doing *Eneide* '83, let's call it, some sort of archival violence. It looks retro, and a tad deluded, and *very* gimmicky. Of course it was gimmicky all along: to me it looks of its time, but the written archive makes it clear that many saw *Eneide* as unnecessarily flashy. A lyric from the time comes to mind, which since my encounter with *Eneide* has always made me laugh: *it isn't my fault if there are performances with smoke and laser rays / if the stages are filled with idiots moving around*⁴⁹². To me, perhaps because my work here has not been the work of the critic, there has never been anything wrong with *Eneide* – it just looks like an early video-game (and really, it's in good company). I'm quite used to early video-games, quite used to that 'flashy' visual vocabulary, which is also distinctively naive with the hindsight of thirty years of stage technologies. But if we *move* – if we surpass the flashy naiveté to see it for what it is – I have to say, *Eneide* is beautiful. It has interesting colours: pinks mixed with golds mixed with mints. A mint-neon horse appears as if galloping, flashing through the scene. The male body is odd and interesting in *Eneide*, the way the male body in stillness becomes the locus of some archetypal yet very fragile idea of 'myth'. Its analogue quality preserves, albeit its very high-tech set-up, that special sense of electronic *grain*. As Tondelli had observed, Krypton didn't need to 'tell the story' of the Aeneid, their effort was to make

⁴⁹² Battiato, Franco. 'Up Patriots to Arms' on *Patriots*. Milan: EMI Italia, 1980.

the idea of the Aeneid visible, palpable, inhabitable somehow⁴⁹³. I recall Castellucci's intentions for the *Divine Comedy* trilogy: to be Dante, and not his work. Krypton could be Virgil, and not his work. Artists leading artists leading artists into the dark wood, into sunsets, into swimming pools: a whole host of spectators recalibrate at each venture at the edges of such penumbras...

I would like to say to Krypton: let *us* move towards *Eneide*, don't make *Eneide* move for us. Rather than updating what was perhaps naive and flashy, you should be glad that that world was yours to – naively, flashily – invent. Flashily perhaps, but *flashingly* for sure: your neon horse is burnt into my spectatorial imagination. Sometimes it flares up on stages who might not know you, and you yourselves might not know those stages: I get to introduce you to each other. Sometimes that neon horse of yours flares up in the city, like Pina Bausch in Central Park.

So, reprises of cult shows aside, I go back to pushing against the darknesses of *Corpo*, fiddling with contrast, moving in order to see, dancing at least to the music. And as I do so, I run my eye over the titles of performances I have made notes of over the years, so many still encrypted in the archive, stuck in formats too difficult to play, stuck in phone numbers that ring out, scrambled like a pay-per-view TV channel, silent like an unanswered love letter. And I notice how strange it is that so many of them invoke a darkness: a performance called *Notturmo*, for example, by an artist with whom I have finally managed to begin a correspondence; a live installation called *Un pomeriggio nella foresta nera*, 'An Afternoon in the Black Forest', of which I have a few photos and comments but little else. Linea D'Ombra

⁴⁹³ Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. 'Krypton' in *Un Weekend Postmoderno: Cronache degli Anni Ottanta*. Milan: Bompiani, 2001. pp. 243-245

(‘Shadow Line’), a collective who made two or three pieces which have interested me all along, and I hope to find them one day; Dark Camera, the stage name of Marcello Sambati, whose work I will soon have enough on to begin to decipher. A tape I found in an archive in Palermo of a show called ‘Dark Sunglasses’ – they won’t let me see it, who knows what it is? A photograph of a certain Giorgio Spiller standing in a white room with a hanging fluorescent disc covering his face, and the disc projects a sort of eclipse on the wall, and the piece is called simply: *Sunrise! What a sunset!* Who knows, maybe the sunset was one of those flashing figures too. And sunsets keep flashing of course, everyday – sunsets, surely, cannot go out of fashion. So the sun is setting into the unreal depths of some infinity pool, we see it through venetian blinds. A TV is on in the distance. In the silence we notice a gun left distractedly on the edge of the pool, a half finished cocktail, but there’s no-one around – like we’ve arrived at the end of god knows what ridiculous party. So ridiculous in fact, that it can’t be real: it *must* be staged. But then a swoosh of soft breeze in the trees, and a horse gallops gallantly by... *then again*, maybe it isn’t.

Bibliography

- Abbar, Ackbas. 'Faking Globalization'. *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*. Ed. Huyssen, Andreas. Durham: Duke, 2008. pp. 248-249.
- Abbott, Edwin Abbott. *Flatlandia: Racconto Fantastico a Più Dimensioni*. Trans. M. D'Amico and G. Manganelli. Milan: Adelphi, 2004.
- Abruzzese, Alberto. *L'intelligenza del mondo: fondamenti di storia e teoria dell'immaginario*. Rome: Meltemi, 2011.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Trans. M. Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Agostini, Roberto. Review for *Jack and Jackie: Wish I Could Fly Like Superman*, 24th October 1979.
- Agostini, Roberto. Review for Antonio Syxty's *Nuova Zelanda. Il Manifesto*, 3rd December 1980.
- Alinovi, Francesca, Barilli, Renato, and Irace, Fulvio. *Una Generazione Postmoderna: I nuovi-nuovi, la postarchitettura, la performance vestita*. Genoa: Mazzotta, 1983.
- Alonge, Roberto (ed). *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo Vol. I, II, III*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001.
- Amato, Joseph. *Dust: a History of the Small and the Invisible*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.
- Amato, Joseph. *Surfaces: a History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013.
- Antonello, Pierpaolo and Mussgnug, Florian (ed). *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.

- Antonello, Pierpaolo and O’Leary, Alan (ed). *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009*. London: MHRA, 2009.
- Antonello, Pierpaolo. *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea*. Milan: Mimesis, 2013.
- Anonymous. ‘Ingenua Avanguardia di un Gruppo Romano’. *Il Giornale*, 15th April 1978. Cited in Bargiacchi, Enzo. ‘Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza’ (see below).
- Anonymous. ‘Sbadigli con l’Ultima Avanguardia’. *L’Avvenire*, 15th April 1978. Cited in Bargiacchi, Enzo. ‘Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza’ (see below).
- Artioli, Umberto. ‘Il “mentale” e il “vitale”’. *Pertinenze e Impertinenze Teatrali e Non*. Mantua: Circolo Ottobre, 1978.
- Assennato, Marco. ‘Anestetica postmoderna: Il passato contro la storia, in architettura’. *Alfabeta* 2.33 (2013): pp. 11-13.
- Attisani, Antonio. ‘Beyond Perspective: Scenic Space in New Italian Theatre’. *Performing Arts Journal* 9.1 (1985): 31-37.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: an Introduction to Super-Modernity*. London: Verso, 2009.
- Auslander, Philip. ‘Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto’. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14:1 (2004): 1-13.
- Auslander, Philip. ‘The Performativity of Performance Documentation’. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 84 (2006): pp. 1-10.
- Balestrini, Nanni and Moroni, Primo. *L’Orda d’Oro 1968-1977: la grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988.
- Bargiacchi, Enzo. ‘Il Cammino della Gaia Scienza’. *Teatrotre / Scrittura Scenica* 22 (1980): pp. 48-71.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

- Bartolucci, Giuseppe (ed.). *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe and Mango, Lorenzo. *Per un Teatro Analitico Esistenziale*. Turin: Studio Forma, 1980.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe. 'The Post Avant-Garde: "An Autointerview"'. *The Drama Review* 22.1 (1978): pp. 103-107.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Intervention at 'La Seduzione Tecnologica'. Conference, Florence 1981.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe. 'Nuova Spettacolarità / Paesaggio Metropolitano'. *Semiotica della Rappresentazione*. Ed. Tomasino, Renato. Palermo: Flaccovio, 1984.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe and Caravella, Titti Denise. 'Roma come New York'. *Sipario* 449, October 1985.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe. 'Dalle Cantine ai Gruppi Emergenti'. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Ed. Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988.
- Bartolucci, Giuseppe. *Testi critici 1964-1987*. Ed. Valentini, Valentina and Mancini, Giancarlo. Rome: Bulzoni, 2007.
- Battista, Pierluigi. '1980, l'anno del riflusso in cui divenimmo moderni'. *Corriere della Sera*, 22nd November 2009.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Paris: Poche Gallimard, 2006 (1858).
- Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Ed. Dyer, Geoff. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso, 2010 (1986).
- Baudrillard, Jean. *On Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Il Buio del Postmoderno*. Rome: Aliberti, 2011.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Il Disagio della Postmodernità*. Trans. V. Verdiani. Milan: Mondadori, 2002.

- Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Benjamin, Walter. 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (Exposé of 1935). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, Rolf. Trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Berardi, Franco 'Bifo'. *After the Future*. Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011.
- Berardi, Franco 'Bifo'. 'Pensiero Italiano'. *Alfabeta* 2 17 March 2013: <http://www.alfabeta2.it/2012/03/17/pensiero-italiano/> (accessed March 2013).
- Berardi, Franco. *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero*. Rome: Derive Approdi, 2004.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke, 2011.
- Bernardi, Claudio and Susa, Carlo. *Storia Essenziale del Teatro*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005.
- Bertoldo, Mino. *Out-Off: 1976-2006*. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2006.
- Bertoldo, Mino. *Out-Off: 1978-2008*. Milan: Edizioni OutOff, 2008.
- Bianchetti, Cristina and Pozzi, Carlo. 'Così la città adriatica diventa banale'. *Il Giornale dell'Architettura* 5 (2003): pp. 29-39.
- Bianchetti, Cristina. 'Il Centro Copia la Periferia'. *Indice dei Libri del Mese* 39.7/8 (2002): p. 39.
- Bianchetti, Cristina. 'La città medio-adriatica'. *Meridiana* 45 (2002): pp. 55-68.
- Bianchi, Ruggero. 'A Process of Transformation: Falso Movimento (Italy)'. *The Drama Review* 27.1 (1983): pp. 40-53.
- Bocca, Giorgio. *Il terrorismo italiano 1970-1978*. Milan: Rizzoli, 1978.

- Bonfiglioli, Rossella (ed). *Frequenze Barbare: Teatro Ambiente / Cinema / Mass Media / Metropoli / Musica / Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini Criminali Prod.* Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981.
- Bosetti, Giancarlo (ed). *Cattiva Maestra Televisione.* Venice: Marsilio, 2002 (1994).
- Boym, Svetlana. 'The Off-Modern Panic Manifesto for 2010 or, what is to be done when everything has been done?'. Published at <http://www.svetlanaboym.com/offmodern.html#excerpt> (accessed May 2014).
- Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Brooker, Peter (ed). *Modernism / Postmodernism.* New York: Longman, 1992.
- Böhme, Gernot. 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics'. Thesis Eleven 36 (1993): pp. 113-126.
- Böhme, Gernot. 'The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres.' *Ambiances: Redécouvertes* (2013) ambiances.revues.org/315 (accessed May 20th 2013).
- Cage, John. *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings.* Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1979.
- Calabrese, Omar. 'Il trompe-l'oeil: è corretto parlare di "inganno degli occhi"?'. *Carte Semiotiche* 12 (2011): pp. 12-30.
- Calvino, Italo. *Saggi.* Ed. M. Barenghi. Milan: Mondadori, 1999.
- Calvino, Italo. *Le Città Invisibili.* Turin: Einaudi, 1972.
- Calvino, Italo. *Why read the classics?* Trans. M. McLaughlin. London: Vintage, 1999.
- Capitta, Gianfranco. 'La Vera Storia del Fidanzato di Barbie'. *La voce di Como*, May 1980.

- Cappelletti, Dante. *La Sperimentazione Teatrale in Italia tra Norma e Devianza*. Rome: Rai Eri, 1981.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996 and 2013.
- Castellucci, Claudia and Romeo. *Les Pèlerins de la Matière: Théorie et Praxis du Théâtre*. Trans. K. Espinoza. Bésançon: Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2001.
- Castellucci, Claudia, Castellucci, Romeo, Guidi, Chiara, Kelleher, Joe and Ridout, Nicholas. *The Theatre of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Castellucci, Claudia. *Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio : Dal teatro iconoclasta alla super-icona*. Milan: Ubulibri Cahiers di Teatro, 1992.
- Castronovo, Enrico. *Le Seuil et l'Intervalle. Hantise de de la Mort et Assimilation du Fantastique*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008.
- Cauteruccio, Giancarlo. *Krypton: Teatri di Luce / Spazio Corpo Tecnologia*. Venice: Titivullis, 2010.
- Cavell, Stanley. 'The Fact of Television'. *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*. Ed. John Hanhardt. Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986. pp. 192-219.
- Ceccarelli, Roberto. 'Echi della rivoluzione nel pensiero'. *Alfabeta 2* 13th May 2014: <http://www.alfabeta2.it/2014/05/13/echi-rivoluzione-nel-pensiero-italiano/> (accessed May 2014).
- Ceserani, Remo. *Raccontare il Postmoderno*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.
- Ceserani, Remo. 'Intellettuali Liquidi o in Liquidazione?'. *Italian Culture* 24.1 (20017): pp. 153–167.
- Ceserani, Remo. 'Modernity and Postmodernity: a Cultural Change Seen from the Italian Perspective'. *Italica* 71.3 (1994): pp. 369-384.

- Chicchi, Federico. 'Si può negare un'immagine? Regime dell'immaginario e godimento del discorso capitalista'. *Alfabeta* 2.33 (2013): pp. 9-10.
- Chiesa, Alberto and Toscano, Lorenzo (ed). *The Italian Difference*. Melbourne: Transmission, 2009.
- Chinzari, Stefania e Paolo Ruffini. *Nuova Scena Italiana: il Teatro dell'Ultima Generazione*. Rome: Castelvechi, 2000.
- Cigliana, Simona. 'Sette Domande sul Teatro d'Avanguardia a Franco Cordelli e a Marco Palladini.' *L'Illuminista* 1.2/3 (2000): pp. 187-232.
- Cirifino, Fabio et al. *Studio Azzurro: Videoambienti, Ambienti Sensibili E Altre Esperienze Tra Arte, Cinema, Teatro E Musica = Video and Sensitive Environments...* Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto and Halley, Jean (ed). *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham: Duke, 2007.
- Cordelli, Franco. 'L'Immaginario sociale di Sixty, Cover Boy.' *Paese Sera*, 22nd January 1981.
- Corsetti, Giorgio Barbertio. *L'Attore Mentale*. Ed. Molinari, Renata. Milan: Ubulibri Cahiers di Teatro, 1992.
- Crainz, Guido. *Autobiografia di una Repubblica: le Radici dell'Italia Attuale*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2009.
- Crainz, Guido. *Il Paese Mancato: dal Miracolo Economico agli anni Ottanta*. Rome: Donzelli, 2005.
- Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books, 2009 (1985).
- De Gregori, Maria Grazia. 'Tra Luna Park e Goldrake Rimini sembra Hollywood.' *L'Unità*, 3rd July 1980.

- De Kerckhove, Derrick. 'Il Senso Comune del Virtuale'. *Virtual* 4 (1993).
- De Santis, Linda. Interview with Antonio Syxty. *Il Messaggero*, 23rd January 1981.
- Deaglio, Enrico. *Patria 1978-2008*. Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2009.
- Dell'Osso, Claudia. *Voglia d'America: Il mito americano in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*. Rome: Donzelli, 2006.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive fever: A Freudian impression*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. Trans. J. Goodman. Philadelphia: Penn State Press, 2005.
- D'Amburgo, Marion, Lombardi, Franco and Tiezzi, Federico. *Sulla Strada dei Magazzini Criminali*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983.
- D'Amburgo, Marion. 'Jang Quing'. In Bonfiglioli, Rossella (ed). *Frequenze Barbare. Musica, Cinema, Metropoli, Mass Media nei Magazzini Criminali Prod*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981.
- D'Amburgo, Marion. 'Come in un Dramma'. *Altri Anni Settanta: Luoghi e Figure di un Teatro Irregolare*. Ed. Valenti, Cristina. Archivio Storico DAMS Bologna Ex Dipartimento di Musica e Spettacolo: <http://box.dar.unibo.it/muspe/wwcat/period/pdd/2002-1/dramma.html> (accessed May 2014).
- D'Arzo, Silvio. *Casa d'altri e altri racconti*. Turin: Einaudi, 1980.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Eco, Umberto. Preface to *Sylvie*. Trans. U. Eco. Turin: Einaudi, 1999.
- Eco, Umberto. *Sette Anni di Desiderio: Cronache 1977-1983*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985.
- Emanuelli, Massimo. *50 di Storia della Televisione Attraverso la Stampa Settimanale*. Milan: Greco e Greco, 2004.

- Emanuelli, Massimo. 'Telecapodistria Koper'. *Storia Radio TV Italiana*: storiaradiotv.it/telecapodistria (accessed February 2014).
- Evans, Richard J. *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*. London: Little, Brown 2014.
- Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.
- Fabbri, Marcello. 'Senza Paesaggio: Autonomia della Metropoli.' *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Ed. Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. pp. 76-82
- Fallaci, Oriana. 'Pasolini a New York / Un marxista a New York'. Interview with Pier Paolo Pasolini. *L'Europeo*, 13th October 1966.
- Featherstone, Mark. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage, 1991.
- Ferraris, Maurizio. *Tracce: Nichilismo Moderno e Postmoderno*. Milan: Mimesis, 2006 (1983).
- Ferraris, Maurizio. 'Su un'Eстетica Postmoderna'. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Ed. Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. pp. 22-25.
- Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.
- Gemini, Laura. *L'incertezza creativa: i percorsi sociali e comunicativi delle performance artistiche*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003. pp. 111-112
- Genet, Jean. 'Four Hours in Chatila'. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12. 3 (1983): pp. 3-22.
- Gentili, Dario. *Italian Theory. Dall'operaismo alla Biopolitica*. Rome: Il Mulino, 2012.
- Gentili, Dario. 'I Conflitti dell'Italian Theory'. *Alfabeta* 2 10 June 2013: <http://www.alfabeta2.it/2013/06/10/i-conflitti-dellitalian-theory/> (accessed June 2013).
- Giannachi, Gabriella and Kaye, Nick. *Staging the Post-avant-garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.

- Gibson, James J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.
- Ginsborg, Paul. *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Ginsborg, Paul. *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Ginzburg, Carlo and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome e il come. Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico.' *Quaderni Storici* 40 (1979), pp. 181-190.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 'Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario.' *Ombre Rosse* 29 (1979): pp. 80-107.
- Grasso, Aldo. *Radio e Televisione: Teorie, Analisi, Storie, Esercizi*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000.
- Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J (ed). *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke, 2010.
- Gribaudo, Maurizio. 'La Lunga Marcia della Microstoria: dalla politica all'estetica?' *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*. Ed. Paola Lanaro. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011. pp. 9-25.
- Guccini, Gerardo. 'Per una Storiografia delle Pulsioni'. *Altri Anni Settanta: Luoghi e Figure di un Teatro Irregolare*. Ed. Valenti, Cristina. Archivio Storico DAMS Bologna Ex Dipartimento di Musica e Spettacolo: <http://box.dar.unibo.it/muspe/wwcat/period/pdd/2002-1/anni70.html> (accessed March 2012).
- Gylfi Magnússon, Sigurður and Szijártó, István M. *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2013.

- Hassan, Ihab. *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Hiding in the Light: on Images and Things*. London: Comedia, 1988.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subcultures: the Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1987.
- Hebdige, Dick. 'The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to The Face'. *Visual Culture: The Reader*. Ed. Hall, Stuart and Evans, Jessica. London: Sage, 1999. pp. 99-125.
- Heckert, Virginia. 'Revisiting some Los Angeles Apartments'. *Ed Rucha and Some Los Angeles Apartments* [exhibition catalogue]. Los Angeles: Getty Publishing, 2013. pp. 6-31
- Higgins, Kathleen Marie. *Comic Relief: Nietzsche's Gay Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Infante, Carlo. 'L'Ultima Avanguardia, tra Memora e Oblío.' *Culture Teatrali: Quarant'Anni di Nuovo Teatro Italiano* 2/3 (2000): pp. 275-291.
- Ingold, Tim. *Lines: a Short History*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Jameson, Fredric. 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.' *New Left Review* 146 (1984): pp. 53-92.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke, 1991.
- Jansen, Monica. *Il Dibattito sul Postmoderno in Italia*. Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002.
- Jencks, Charles. *Modern Movements in Architecture*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- Jones, Amelia. "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation'. *Art Journal* 56.4 (1997): pp. 11-18.
- Joubert, Suzanne. *Cesena dans le Paysage*. Bésançon: Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2004.

- Kaye, Nick. *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Kelleher, Joe. 'On Self-Remembering Theatres' [Sui Teatri Autorimembranti]. Ed. Gravano, Viviana, Pitozzi, Enrico and Sacchi, Annalisa. Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008.
- Kelleher, Joe and Ridout, Nicholas (ed). *Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Landi, Paolo. 'Antonio Syxty: Cover Boy'. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Ed. Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982.
- Latimer, Dan. 'Jameson and Post-Modernism.' *New Left Review* 148 (1984): pp. 116-128.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 'From Logos to Landscape: text in contemporary dramaturgy'. *Performance Research* 2.1 (1997): pp. 55-60.
- Lombardi, Sandro. *I Giorni Felici: Realtà e Memoria nel Lavoro dell'Attore*. Milan: Garzanti, 2004.
- Magazzini Criminali. *Crollo Nervoso*. Brescia: L'Obliquo, 1986.
- Magazzini Criminali. *Magazzini Criminali 1, 2, 3, 4, 5* [fanzines] and *Magazzini 6, 7, 8* [bound journals]. Milan: Ubulibri, 1980-1988.
- Manacorda, Giorgio. 'A Roma lo Spettro del Teatro'. *La Stampa*, 7th January 1978
- Mancewicz, Aneta. 'Re-routing Intermediality: Digital Intermediality without Digital Technology.' Unpublished conference paper.
- Mango, Achille. *Verso una Sociologia del Teatro*. Trapani: Celebes, 1978.
- Mango, Lorenzo. *Teatro di Poesia: Saggio su Federico Tiezzi*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1994.
- Mango, Lorenzo. *La Scrittura Scenica: Un codice e le sue pratiche nel teatro del Novecento*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2003.

- Mango, Lorenzo. Preface to *Crollo Nervoso*. Brescia: L'Obliquo, 1986.
- Mann, Alfred. *The Study of Fugue*. New York: Norton, 1987 (1958).
- Manzella, Gianni. 'Sette UFO armati calano sul pianeta spiaggia: sognando California il Carrozzone assale Rimini.' *Il Manifesto*, 4th July 1980.
- Marranca, Bonnie. 'Light in the Piazza: Santarcangelo, Italy'. *Performing Arts Journal* 6.1 (1981): pp. 136-139.
- Martino, Nicolas. 'La Luccicanza Italiana'. *Alfabeta* 2.33 (2013): p. 8.
- Martone, Mario. *Falso Movimento: Ritorno ad Alphaville*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1987.
- Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge, 2001 (1964).
- Mendini, Alessandro and Spinelli, Luigi. *Domus Vol. 9: 1980-1984*. Milan: Taschen, 2009.
- Mendini, Alessandro et al. *Elogio del Banale*. Ed. Radice, Barbara. Milan: Studio Forma, 1980.
- Mendini, Alessandro. *Casa per Giulietta*. Milan: Bianca e Volta, 1982.
- Mendini, Alessandro. *Design interviews. Alessandro Mendini*. Ed. Museo Alessi. Trans. A. Sadleir. Milan: Corraini, 2008.
- Mendini, Alessandro. *La Poltrona di Proust: architettura, arte, design e altro*. Ed. Marisa Galbiati. Milan: Tranchida, 1991.
- Mendini, Alessandro. *Paesaggio Casalingo*. Milan: Domus, 1979.
- Mendini, Alessandro. 'Cosmesi Universale'. *Domus* 617 (1981): supplement.

- Mendini, Alessandro. 'Per un'Architettura Banale' (previously unpublished essay, 30th October 1979):
 ateliermendini.it/index.php/mact=News,cntnt01,detail0&cntnt01articleid=251&cntnt01detailtemplate=AnniDett&cntnt01lang=en_US&cntnt01returnid=191 (last accessed 5th August 2014).
- Merrin, William. 'Television is Killing the Art of Symbolic Exchange: Baudrillard's Theory of Communication'. *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.3 (1999): 119-140.
- Mila, Massimo. *Scritti Civili*. Turin: Einaudi, 1995.
- Molho, Tony, 'Carlo Ginzburg: Reflections on the intellectual cosmos of a 20th-century historian'. *History of European Ideas* 30 (2004): pp. 121–148.
- Monteleone, Franco. *Storia della Radio e della Televisione in Italia: Costume, Società e Politica*. Venice: Marsilio, 1992.
- Morreale, Emiliano. *L'Invenzione della Nostalgia*. Rome: Donzelli, 2009.
- Moscato, Italo. 'L'Avanguardia va Sui Tetti'. *L'Europeo*, 17th February 1978.
- Moscato, Italo. Review of *Ragazze 81. Amica*, 1st September 1981.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Neff, Renfreu. 'Benvenuto: New York-Italy by Falso Movimento; Krypton; La Gaia Scienza'. *Performing Arts Journal* 8.3 (1984): pp. 87-91.
- Negri, Antonio. 'La Sconfitta del '77'. *L'Orda d'Oro 1968-1977: la grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale*. Ed. Balestrini, Nanni and Moroni, Primo. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988.
- Nerval, Gérard. *Sylvie*. Trans. U. Eco. Turin: Einaudi, 1999.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1979.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Bonito Oliva, Achille. *Il Passo dello Strabismo*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978.
- Bonito Oliva, Achille. *The Italian Transavantgarde*. Milan: Giancarlo Politi, 1980.
- Ortoleva, Peppino. *Un Ventennio a Colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia 1975-95*. Milan: Giunti, 1995.
- Ortoleva, Peppino. 'Il ricordo e il trauma. Nell'Italia degli anni Settanta.' *Ermanno Olmi: il cinema, la televisione, la scuola*. Ed. A. Aprà. Venice: Marsilio, 2003. pp. 182-185.
- Ortoleva, Peppino. 'Meglio Tardi che Mai'. *Diario del Mese, Speciale 1977-2007: Se io Avessi Previsto Tutto Questo VII.2* (2007): pp. 126-132.
- Pacoda, Pierfrancesco. *Riviera Club Culture: la Scena Dance nella Metropoli Balneare*. Rimini: NdA, 2012.
- Palandri, Enrico. *Pier: Tondelli e la Generazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2005.
- Palladini, Marco. 'Italian Theory or Not?'. *Alfabeta Bloc Notes* 3 November 2013: <http://www.alfabeta2.it/2013/11/03/italian-theory-or-not/> (accessed November 2013).
- Panzeri, Fulvio. *Riccione e la Riviera Vent'anni Dopo*. Rimini: Guaraldi Editore, 2005.
- Paola Lanaro (ed). *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *La Lunga Strada di Sabbia*. Ed. Séclier, Philippe. Rome: Contrasto Due, 2005.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Empirismo Eretico*. Milan: Garzanti, 1972.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Lettere Luterane (con Gennariello)*. Turin: Einaudi, 1976.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pasolini e la Forma della città* [documentary film]. Rome: RAI, 1974.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Poesia in Forma di Rosa*. Milan: Garzanti, 1964.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Scritti Corsari*. Milan: Garzanti, 1975.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 'Manifesto per un Nuovo Teatro'. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Teatro*. Milan: Garzanti 1988 (1968).

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *The Letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini vol. 1*. Trans. S. Wood. London: Quartet, 1992.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 'Due Modeste Proposte per Eliminare la Criminalità in Italia'. *Lettere Luterane*. Turin: Einaudi, 1976. pp. 172-179.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. "'Il Vuoto del Potere' ovvero 'L'articolo delle Lucciole'". *Scritti Corsari*. Milan: Garzanti, 1975. pp. 106-112.

Pavese, Cesare. 'Atlantic Oil' (1933). *Disaffections: Complete Poems 1930-1950*. Trans. G. Brock. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Books, 2002.

Pearson, Michael. *Imagined Places: Journeys through literary America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Pearson, Mike. *Mickery Theater: An Imperfect Archaeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

Pearson, Mike. *Site Specific Performance*. London: Palgrave, 2010.

Pearson, Mike. *Theatre / Archeology*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Pellegrini, Ann and Puar, Jasbir. 'Affect.' *Social Text* 27.3 (2009): pp. 35-38.

Perniola, Mario (ed). 'Strategie del Bello: 40 Anni di Estetica Italiana'. *Agalma* 18 (2010).

Perniola, Mario. *Art and its Shadow*. Trans. M. Verdicchio. London: Continuum, 2004.

- Perniola, Mario. *Berlusconi, o il '68 Realizzato*. Milan: Mimesis, 2011.
- Perniola, Mario. *Del Sentire Cattolico. La Forma Culturale di una Religione Universale*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011.
- Perniola, Mario. *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*. Trans. C. Woodall. London: Verso, 1995.
- Perniola, Mario. *La Societa' dei Simulacri*. Bologna: Cappelli, 1980.
- Perniola, Mario. *Miracoli e Traumi della Comunicazione*. Turin: Einaudi, 2009.
- Perniola, Mario. *Transiti*. Bologna: Cappelli, 1985.
- Perniola, Mario. 'Autointervista sulla fantascienza'. Festival della Fantascienza SCIENCE + FICTION (Trieste, 21-30 September 2001). Ed. La Cappella Underground.
- Perniola, Mario. 'Per una rivalutazione della nozione di profondità'. *Ricostruzione della soggettività / Reconstruction of Subjectivity*. Ed. Bodei, Remo et al. Naples: Liguori, 2004. pp. 215-227.
- Perniola, Mario. 'The difference of the Italian Philosophical Culture'. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 10:1 (1984), pp. 103-16.
- Piovene, Guido. *Viaggio in Italia*. Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 2003 (1957).
- Pitrolo, Flora. 'In Praise of Surfaces.' *The Live Art Almanac Volume 3*. Ed. Keidan, Lois and Wright, Aaron. London: Oberon Books, 2013. pp. 328-333.
- Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. 'Morte del teatro. Il cavallo ucciso rompe la fiction scenica'. *Il Manifesto*, 23rd July 1985.
- Ponte di Pino, Oliviero. *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975-1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1988.

- Puliani, Massimo (ed). *Teatro come Poiesis: Linguaggi della Scena Anni Ottanta*. Bologna: Il Lavoro Editoriale, 1987.
- Quadri, Franco. 'Questo Libro'. *Epitaph*. Ed. Romeo Castellucci / Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Milan: Ubulibri, 2003.
- Restany, Pierre. 'The Future of the City in a Home Today / Il Futuro di una Città in una Casa Oggi.' *Domus* 636, February 1983.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Ridout, Nicholas. 'Make-Believe: Societas Raffaello Sanzio do Theatre'. *Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Kelleher, Joe and Ridout, Nicholas. London: Routledge, 2006. pp. 175-187.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Roche, Denis. *La Disparition des lucioles: Réflexions sur l'acte photographique*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma / Ecrit sur l'image, 1982.
- Ronchey, Alberto. *Libro Bianco dell'Ultima Generazione*. Milan: Garzanti, 1978.
- Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Rossi, Catharine and Coles, Alex (ed). *The Italian Avant-Garde 1968-1976*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013.
- Sartori, Giovanni. *Homo Videns*. Roma: Laterza, 2010 (1997).
- Schneider, Rebecca. *The Explicit Body in Performance*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 'Performance Remains'. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Heathfield, Adrian and Jones, Amelia (ed). Bristol: Intellect, 2012.

Schneider, Rebecca. 'Performance remains'. *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001): pp. 100-108.

Sciascia, Leonardo. *L'Affaire Moro*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1978.

Serematakis, Nadia. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Simonetti, Gianluigi. 'Nostalgia dell'azione: La fortuna della lotta armata nella narrativa italiana degli anni Zero'. *Allegoria* 64 (2012): pp. 97-124.

Sinisi, Silvana. *Dalla Parte dell'Occhio: Esperienze Teatrali in Italia 1972-1982*. Rome: Kappa, 1983.

Sinisi, Silvana. 'Kleine Welt in Turchese'. *Paesaggio Metropolitano*. Ed. Bartolucci, Giuseppe. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982. p. 220-224

Sinisi, Silvana. 'Neoavanguardia e postavanguardia in Italia'. *Avanguardie ed Utopie del Teatro, Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo Vol. 20*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001.

Skantze, P.A. 'A Good Catch: Practicing Generosity'. *Performance Research* 12:2, pp. 138-144.

Skantze, P.A. *Itinerant Spectator / Itinerant Spectacle*. New York: Punctum, 2013.

Smith, Lawrence G. *Cesare Pavese and America: Life, Love, and Literature*. Boston: University of Massachusettes Press, 2008.

Societas Raffaello Sanzio. 'Kaputt Necropolis'. *Magazzini* 8. Ed. Magazzini Criminali. Milan: Ubu, 1985.

Sofer, Andrew. *Dark Matter. Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.

Sofri, Adriano. 'Berlusconi, Saviano e la Cosmesi Universale.' *La Repubblica*, 20th April 2010.

- Starobinski, Jean. 'The Idea of Nostalgia'. Trans. W. S. Kemp. *Diogenes* 14.54 (1966): pp. 81-103.
- Stellardi, Gisueppe. 'Pensiero Debole, Nihilism and Ethics, or How Strong is Weakness?'. *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*. Ed. Antonello, Pierpaolo and Mussgnug, Florian. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.
- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke, 1984.
- Syxt, Antonio. *Kennedy*. Milan: Self-published, 1980.
- Thrift, Nigel. 'Driving in the City'. *Theory Culture Society* 21.41 (2004): pp. 41-59.
- Tiqun. *Premiers Matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune Fille*. Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2001.
- Tomasino, Renato. *Storia del Teatro e dello Spettacolo*. Palermo: Palumbo, 2001.
- Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Altri Libertini*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980.
- Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Dinner Party (la Notte della Vittoria)*. Milano: Bompiani, 1994.
- Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Rimini*. Milan: Bompiani, 1985.
- Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. *Un Weekend Postmoderno: Cronache dagli Anni Ottanta*. Milan: Bompiani, 2001.
- Tronti, Mario. 'Our Operaismo'. *New Left Review* 73 (2012): pp. 119-140.
- Valentini, Valentina, Epstein, Susana and Schechner, Richard. 'In Search of Lost Stories: Italian Performance in the mid-'80s. Three Interviews.'. *The Drama Review*. 32.3 (1988): pp. 109-125.
- Valentini, Valentina. *Corpi Mondì Materie: Il Teatro del Secondo Novecento*. Milan: Mondadori, 2007.

- Vaneigem, Raoul. *The Movement of the Free Spirit: General Considerations and First-Hand Testimony Concerning Some Brief Flowerings of Life in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and, Incidentally, in Our Own Time*. New York: Zone, 1994 (1986).
- Vattimo, Gianni and Rovatti, Pier-Aldo. *Il pensiero debole*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983.
- Vattimo, Gianni. *La fine della modernità*. Milan, Garzanti, 1985.
- Vattimo, Gianni. 'Il Pensiero Debole e la Tradizione Cristiana'. *La Stampa*, 12th October 1999.
- Ventrucci, Cristina. 'Cicatrici di un'abituaria del Teatro'. *Epitaph*. Ed. Romeo Castellucci / Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Milan: Ubulibri, 2003.
- Vidal, Ricarda. *Death and Desire in Car Crash Culture: a Century of Romantic Futurisms*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013.
- Viesti, Nicola. 'Il Teatro delle Cantine Alla Soglia degli anni Settanta'. *Altri Anni Settanta: Luoghi e Figure di un Teatro Irregolare*. Ed. Valenti, Cristina. Archivio Storico DAMS Bologna Ex Dipartimento di Musica e Spettacolo: <http://box.dar.unibo.it/muspe/wwcat/period/pdd/2002-1/cantine.html> (accessed March 2012).
- Vv. Aa. *Arte Italiana 1960-1982* [exhibition catalogue]. London and Milan: Electa / Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982.
- Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 2: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1980*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1980.
- Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 3: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1981. Teatro + Musica*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1981.
- Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 4: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1982. Teatro + Lirica*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1982.
- Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 5/6: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1983*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1983.
- Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 7: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1984*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1984.

Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 8: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1985*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1985.

Vv. Aa. *Il Patalogo 9: Annuario dello Spettacolo 1986*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1986.

Vv. Aa. *Transavanguardia* [exhibition catalogue]. Milan: Skira / Castello di Rivoli Museo di Arte Contemporanea, 2002.

Vv. Aa. *Individuo e Coscienza della Crisi nel Teatro Contemporaneo*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1981.

Welton, Martin. *Feeling Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

White, Hayden. 'The Italian Difference and the Politics of Culture'. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 10:1 (1984), pp. 117–22.

Wilkie, Fiona. 'Site-specific Performance and the Mobility Turn'. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22.2 (2012): pp. 203-212.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Žižek, Slavoj. 'Why are Laibach and the NSK not fascists?' *M'ARS* 3/4. Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1994.

Cited Archival Material (publicly available)

Krypton, *Corpo* (video recording). <http://www.e-theatre.it/2010/10/23/Corpo.cfm>

La Gaia Scienza, *Cuori Strappati* (video recording). <http://www.e-theatre.it/2010/10/17/CUORI-STRAPPATI.cfm>

Magazzini Criminali. *Crollo Nervoso* (film). Sapienza University Archives: <http://www.eclap.eu/portal/?q=home&axoid=urn:axmedis:00000:obj:5de2d410-d63b-4256-b5bd-d12e514bb725§ion=europeana>

Cited Archival Material (unpublished)

Courtesy of Antonio Syxty:

Bartolucci, Giuseppe interviewed by Antonio Syxty (typed document).

Letters to Antonio Syxty Fan Club (handwritten document).

Scripts and sketches for *Gas Station* (various versions).

Scripts, sketches and photographs for and from *Eloise* (various versions).

Scripts, sketches and photographs for and from *Nuova Zelanda* (various versions).

Scripts, sketches and photographs for and from *Ragazze* (various versions).

Scripts, sketches and photographs for and from *Ragazze 81* (various versions).

Courtesy of Compagnia Solari / Vanzi:

La Gaia Scienza, *Gli Insetti Preferiscono le Ortiche* (video recording).

Solari / Vanzi, *Notturni Diamanti* (video-recording).

Percorsi Cifrati, CD-Rom / Sketch for unhappened website designed by Marco Solari, Alessandra Vanzi and Carlo Infante containing excerpts of video, audio and photography.

Scripts, sketches and photographs for and from *La Rivolta degli Oggetti*, *Cronache Marziane*, *Una Notte sui Tetti*, *Blu Oltremare*, *Sogni Proibiti*, *Ensemble*, *Turchese*, *Scintille*, *Cuori Strappati*, *Gli Insetti Preferiscono le Ortiche*, *Notturni Diamanti*.

Courtesy of Valentina Valentini:

Magazzini Criminali, *Genet a Tangeri* (video-recording).

Magazzini Criminali, *Crollo Nervoso* (video-recording).

Falso Movimento, *Tango Glaciale* (video-recording).

Courtesy of Mauro Petruzziello:

Falso Movimento, *Foresta Nera*, *Rosso Texaco*, *Perfidi Incanti*, *Tango Glaciale* (video-theatre).

Courtesy of Carlo Infante:

Index P.O.W Videoteatro (compilation of performances and video performances, mixed and produced by Carlo Infante).

Courtesy of Biennale di Venezia:

Magazzini Criminali, *Sulla Strada* (video-recording).

•

Cited Audio

Baby's Gang. *America on Challenger*, LP. Parma: Memory Records, 1985.

Daniel Bacalov. *Diario Segreto Contraffatto*, LP. Rome: CPDS, 1985.

Daniel Bacalov and Pietro Milesi. *La Camera Astratta*, CD. Silver Spring, MA: Cuneiform, 1989.

Franco Battiato. *Up Patriots to Arms on Patriots*, LP. Milan: EMI Italia, 1980.

Alberto Camerini. *Gelato Metropolitano*, 45". Altavilla Vicentina: Cramp, 1977.

Daiano. *I Ragazzi di Città on I Ragazzi di Città*, LP. Milan: Ricordi, 1982.

Mimmo Del Giacco. *Un Panorama / Recizione*, 45". Naples: Slinger Records, 1985.

Dizzy Gillespie. *Night in Tunisia* (standard). 1942.

Francesco Guccini. *Fra la Via Emilia e il West*, 2 LP. Milan: EMI Italia, 1984.

Krisma. *Cathode Mamma on Cathode Mamma*, LP. Milan: Polydor Italia, 1980.

Lee, Peggy. *Is That All There Is? on Is That All There is?*, LP. Capitol Records, 1969.

Magazzini Criminali. *Crollo Nervoso*, LP. Bologna: Italian Records, 1980.

Magazzini Criminali. *Honolulu 25 Dicembre 1990 on Chantons Noël: Ghosts of Christmas Past*, LP. Bruxelles: Les Disques du Crépuscule / Factory Benelux, 1981.

Marsico, Maurizio. *As Diamond Cleanness*, K7. Self-released, 1981.

O.A.S.I / Compagnia Solari / Vanzi. *Il Cavaliere Azzurro*, LP. Florence: IRA, 1986.

Roxy Music. *In Every Dream Home a Heartache on For your Pleasure*, LP. London: Island, 1973.

Giuni Russo, *Crisi Metropolitana*, on *Energie*, LP. Milan: CGD, 1981.

Litfiba. *Eneide di Krypton*, LP. Venice: Suono Records, 1983.

Vv. Aa. *Pordenone / The Great Complotto*, LP. Bologna: Italian Records, 1980.

•

Figures

The image printed on p. 5 of this thesis is a still from the video-version of Falso Movimento's *Tango Glaciale* (Falso Movimento / RAI, 1982). Courtesy of Mauro Petruzzello.

Appendix # 1 / *Crollo Nervoso*

Paper CD sleeve (attached to back cover) containing a CD of Magazzini Criminali's *Crollo Nervoso* (Bologna: Italian Records, 1980), ripped and copied by myself for the sole purpose of scholarship, and intended as a companion to Part One, Chapter 7: *This Message was Recorded before your Departure: Paraphrasis of Crollo Nervoso*. pp. 85-116 of this thesis.

Tracklist:

Track 1: A1 *Mogadiscio 1985*

A2 *Los Angeles International Airport Tre Anni Dopo*

Track 2: B1 *Saigon 21 Luglio 1969*

B2 *Africa Agosto 2001*

Sleeve Credits:

'Live recordings of experimental theatre performances realized by Magazzini Criminali with samples from famous musicians' records.

Progetto Musicale: Sandro Lombardi, Federico Tiezzi, Marion D'Amburgo.

Testi: Magazzini Criminali.

Ibridi sonori tratti da Brian Eno, Robert Fripp, Billie Holliday, Brion Gysin, Jon Hassel, Miles Davis, David Byrne.

Registrato live in Akkra, Dakar, Berlino.'

Copyright Magazzini Criminali Productions.

Appendix # 2 / Ethical Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DTP 12/ 008 in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 21st May 2012.

See overleaf for a copy of the Participant Consent Form.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Titolo del Progetto di Ricerca: *What Was Before isn't Anymore: Image, Theatre and the Italian Post-Avantgarde 1978-1984.*

Descrizione del Progetto di Ricerca: questo progetto si propone di ri-tracciare la dimensione estetica e culturale della Post-Avanguardia italiana – o Nuova Spettacolarità – tra il 1978 e il 1984. Attraverso un'investigazione approfondita del momento, e dedicando alle opere una rinnovata attenzione critica, questa ricerca vuole illuminare il ruolo centrale che la Post-Avanguardia ha avuto nel formare le successive generazioni di compagnie di ricerca, in Italia e in Europa.

Contatto del Ricercatore: Flora Pitrolo
Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance
Jubilee Building, Digby Stuart College
Roehampton Lane
London SW15 5PJ
pitrolof@roehampton.ac.uk
+44 (0)7891733838
+39 3478162468

Dichiarazione di Consenso:

Mi impegno a prendere parte a questo progetto e so di potermi ritirare in qualsiasi momento. Capisco che le informazioni trasmesse nel corso di questo lavoro rimarranno nelle mani di Flora Pitrolo e che Flora Pitrolo mi contatterà prima di utilizzarle per qualsiasi scopo che non sia la tesi finale del suo progetto di ricerca. Capisco che, a meno che non lo dichiari esplicitamente su questo modulo, la mia partecipazione non sarà anonima e che Flora Pitrolo avrà cura di citarmi appropriatamente ogni qual volta utilizzi materiale tratto dalla mia contribuzione. Capisco, inoltre, che il materiale da me rilasciato sarà conservato elettronicamente da Flora Pitrolo e protetto da password di sicurezza per almeno 10 anni e che nessuna delle registrazioni sarà resa pubblica senza il mio consenso. Qualora io desideri una copia della registrazione o una trascrizione della mia intervista, Flora Pitrolo sarà in grado di fornirmela.

Nome

Firma

Data

E' pregato/a di rivolgersi al ricercatore per qualsiasi domanda relativa a qualsiasi aspetto della Sua contribuzione a questo progetto di ricerca. Se per qualsiasi motivo dovesse preferire rivolgerSi ad un terzo, sono riportati qui di seguito i contatti dei Professori che seguono la ricerca di Flora Pitrolo:

Relatore:

Dr P.A. Skantze
Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance
Jubilee Building, Digby Stuart College
Roehampton Lane
London SW15 5PJ
pa.skantze@roehampton.ac.uk
+44 020 8392 3037

Capo Dipartimento:

Prof. Joe Kelleher
Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance
Jubilee Building, Digby Stuart College
Roehampton Lane
London SW15 5PJ
j.kelleher@roehampton.ac.uk
+44 020 8392 3708